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**Challenges of university academic
adjustment: A case study of East Asian
international postgraduate students at one
British University**

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of Warwick, Institute of Education

March 2008

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Acknowledgement

This Ph.D. would be impossible without those people who have kindly helped me academically and emotionally. I would like to give my deepest appreciation to my supervisors, Dr Michael Hammond and Dr Ann Barnes, who have helped me through all the stages of this research with great patience, inspiration and constant encouragement. My great gratitude is also sent to Professor Eleanor Nesbitt, who has showed great interest in my research at the early stage of this project. Eleanor has also given me great support when I had personal problems, and has provided valuable comments on the first five chapters of this thesis. I am also grateful to Ms Ieda Santos, who has been my office mate for four years, for her valuable academic advice. Many thanks are due to Dr. Jung-Rong Chen and Dr Mari Ayano, whom I have never met but who have kindly sent their thesis to me, and has patiently answered my questions. I would also extend my appreciation to the kind staff in the Institute of Education, International Office and Language Centre in Warwick University. All of them have made my life valuable and positive in the UK.

I would also like to offer my greatest thanks to Ms Gill Shipp, with whom I have lived for the past four years. She is a great listener, language instructor and friend who cares for me. My great thanks are also due to Mr Andrew Smith, who introduced me to understanding the inside power of myself when I was upset. Andrew is also a great listener and friend of mine. My further thanks are extended to Mr David Ayrton and Mr Peter Brown, who have been my friends and proofreaders. My thanks are due to the Asian students who joined in my field work, for their interest, cooperation, support and precious time for my research.

Finally, I would like to express my thanks to my fiancé Dr Chi Wing Mark Wong, for his patience, support and love. I would also like to extend my appreciation to my father, my sisters and all of my friends all over the world for their moral support.

Declaration

The work in this thesis was developed and conducted by the author between October 2003 and March 2008. I declare that, apart from work whose authors are explicit acknowledged, this thesis and the materials contained in the thesis represents original work undertaken solely by the author. I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Papers in Conference Proceedings by the author:

Wu, W. (2006). East Asian international postgraduate students in one UK university: a cross-cultural perspective. In: *The 36th Annual SCUTREA Conference*, July 4-July 6 2006, Trinity and All Saints College, Leeds, UK.

Wu, W., and Hammond, M. (2006). East Asian international postgraduate students in one UK university: a literature review. In: *The international learner: enhancing the student experience*, Southampton, September 13-14 2006. Southampton: Southampton Solent University.

Wu, W., Hammond, M. and Barnes, A. (2007) (forthcoming) Exploring participants' strategies for learning English in a cross-cultural learning environment - a story of East Asian students in one UK University. In: *International bilingual conference: assessing language and (inter-) cultural competences in higher education*, Turku, 30 August- 1 September, 2007. University of Turku, Finland.

Abstract

This is a study of international East Asian (Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Thai and Korean) postgraduate students' experience of adjustment (n=40) at a university in the UK in the year 2004/5. It is an empirical case study which investigates English language adjustment, academic adjustment and sociocultural adjustment. It employs a mix of methods – questionnaire, research diary, and interviews, in order to achieve triangulation for validity and reliability. Data were coded in order and grouped into themes. Findings were reported in eight narrative accounts of individual students; in a thematic description; and in models of integration and adjustment. It was found that, overall, East Asian students were largely positive and the study describes strategies used to address difficulties and challenges. However one example of failure in the university (i.e. an unhappy experience) was given. The study presents the notion of an “integrated international student experience” to help understand the experience of the sojourner in an academic institution. This research has made a significant contribution to the literature on adjustment and transition of international students in the UK. In addition, using narrative accounts to present data has also contributed to methodological issues in studying living and study abroad.

Glossaries

Sojourner: (i.e. a temporary resident who voluntarily goes abroad for a set period of time that is usually associated with a specific assignment or contract, Ward et al, 2001)

East Asian students: in this thesis, East Asian students refers to students who are from East Asian countries where English is not their first or official language. Hence students from certain countries, such as Singapore and India where English is one of their official languages are not included in this research.

International postgraduate students: students who are not from the host country (in this research, the UK), nor the European Union, and who have finished their undergraduate studies in their home countries.

Node: a node in NVIVO (a kind of qualitative software) is a way of bring together ideas, thoughts and definitions about your data, along with selected passages of text (from Gibbs, 2002, p.31). Nvivo distinguishes three ways of keeping nodes: *free nodes*, *tree nodes* and *case nodes*. *Free nodes* are the simplest and appear as a simple list in the programme. Like all nodes, they have a title, icon, description, and one or two other properties such as the dates when created and modified. *Tree nodes* have all the properties of free nodes, but in addition are organized into a hierarchy or tree shown in the Node Browser like the file and folder hierarchy in Window Explorer (adopted from Gibbs, 2002, p.31).

ICT: Information Communication Technology

ICC: Intercultural Communicative Competence

Co-nationals: individuals of the same nationality

Cross-cultural: involving more than one culture

Cultural distance: the amount of perceived similarity/dissimilarity between two cultures

Host nationals: individuals who are nationals of a country that accepts (and hosts) international students

Intercultural: between different cultures

Chapter 1 Introduction

This thesis explores the experience of East Asian postgraduate international students at one UK university. This introduction briefly outlines my motivation to do this research, the significance of this research, my research questions and a short review to each chapter.

1.1. Why do this study

In the late summer of 2001 I came to England to do my Master's Degree course. At that time I experienced culture shock and language problems, and was disorientated for a period of time. Everything was different from my home country. For example, when I first got a bus timetable, I did not know how to make sense of it. I could speak some English, but I found the way people expressed themselves was totally different from the way I did. I was very silent in those early days because I was afraid that I would make mistakes and people would laugh at me.

Methods of teaching were used which I was not familiar with. In my home country, the teacher was the most important person in the classroom, and students obeyed the teacher's guidance. In England I found that students were placed in a more equal position, and often the teacher was the facilitator for learning. I felt lost and was not sure how I should behave. Thanks to my friends' and teachers' help, that period was not too long. At the initial stage of my overseas study, I met some senior students in the same department, and

they gave me invaluable advice ranging from academic to daily life. For example in the UK at Master's level many courses do not have a textbook, while in most Asian countries traditionally every subject has a textbook. Hence note taking and using tutors' handouts are more important when taking lectures in English universities. For daily life, practical tips, like where to go shopping for special regional food, and how to find items at the best prices was information I was keen to know. Those senior students also helped me adopt a number of strategies in my social and academic life, such as asking feedback from proofreaders, using the internet to gain material in the target language, attending social gatherings to improve language skills and cross-cultural awareness and so on. At that time I discovered the power of new technologies, and was amazed by them. For example I was introduced to using the online database from the online library, so without physically going to the library I could study in my room. Another example was learning to use an instant online chatting system to exchange information with my friends and family all over the world free of charge. Here lay the roots of my interest in this research.

In 2003 when I started to do my MPhil/PhD, my first interest was in exploring the relationship between ICT (information and communications technology) and English language learning. However the project did not run smoothly. There was a link with my general interest in East Asian students' experience of study and ICT but only a tangential one. My focus became clearer to me as I started to understand Asian students' lives when I found a part time job at Green University.

From 2004 I was part time welfare assistant and receptionist in the international office, University of Green. Then between 2004 and 2006, every summer I worked as mentor for the pre-session English language course which was run by the Centre for English Language Teacher Education, University of Green. My working experience gave me the chance to get in touch with a large number of international students, and to understand their stories of both the academic and non-academic aspects of their daily lives. My research interest shifted. I found increasing numbers of Asian students coming to England for their higher education, and many of them had confronted frustrations similar to mine. I hoped there would be some up to date research to help Asian students transfer to a new environment more smoothly than I did and to make their life less stressful and more meaningful.

1.2. East Asian postgraduate students in the UK

Chapter 2 gives a review of the literature about international students. To set the scene in this introduction it is noted that after World War II, the USA became an especially popular country for international students world-wide (Wang, 2004). Research carried out by the Institute of International Education (IIE) indicated that there were over 572,000 international students enrolled at U.S. colleges and universities during the academic year 2003/2004. In recent years, the internationalisation of higher education in English-speaking countries has also meant that other countries, including Australia and the UK, have increased numbers of South-East Asian students in higher education (Bodycott and Walker, 2000). Asian students have more opportunities than

before to study in overseas countries for their higher education. In the last decade, after the USA, England has become the second most popular choice for overseas students (Meiras, 2004).

If we take the University of Green (England) year 2004/2005 as an example, in total there were about 15,833 full-time students, of whom 3,213 were from overseas. They represented 20 percent of the whole student population. Among all these overseas students, approximately 72 percent were from Asian countries (including East, South East and South Asian countries) (University of Green, Academic Statistics 2004-2005). The experience of Asian students at Green, and in UK universities in general, is a great deal of concern to universities, to the students themselves and to prospective students.

According to a report from the British Council (internal use for ECS member institutions 2002/3), there were about 163,820 'other overseas students' (i.e. non-EU, non other European Economic Area, non EU accession countries) taking their postgraduate or undergraduate studies in the UK (including full-time, part-time and sandwich students), of whom 48,890 were from China, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand and South Korea. So according to these figures students from what we might term the Far East constituted over 30 percent of all non-EU higher education students in the UK.

The reasons for these growing numbers of international students are commonly seen as:

1. the attraction of an internationally recognised qualification to enhance career prospects
 2. the opportunity to gain a window on another culture
 3. greater international mobility and emigration prospects
 4. the desire to gain fluency in the English language
 5. the wish to obtain qualifications unobtainable in their own countries
- (Makepeace, 1989; McNamara & Harris, 1997).

An additional reason is economic. Asian economies have been developing very quickly, especially mainland China. More families can now afford the high tuition fees for their children's overseas study. The easier visa policy and high international reputation have attracted many Asian students to the UK. In 2005, there were about 80,000 international mainland Chinese students studying in the UK (BBC News, 29/08/2005).

Past research has looked at the "snapshot" experience of international students in the UK (Li et al, 1997, Zeng 1997). Others have looked at international students as customers (Allen and Higgins, 1994), but less has been done from the international students' point of view, or to observe them over a period of time. Much of the research offers some recommendations for an institution to improve its 'service' to enable international students to make a smoother adjustment to study in the UK. However the emphasis is on the individual student rather than the wider environment (Pelletier 2003).

1.3. This study

As a contribution to the field, this thesis describes a project to explore the academic adjustment experience of students from East Asia (China, Taiwan, Japan, Thailand and South Korea) at the University of Green (UK). The research raises questions about three aspects of students' experience, namely English language learning, adjustment to new academic cultures and the sociocultural environment.

Culture comes as a key concept in this thesis. Culture is an underlying concept behind people's behaviour. We do not see culture on the surface, rather what we see is "the tip of the iceberg, in fact supported by a much larger although invisible part underneath the waterline" (Amorim, 2001). Cultural misunderstanding or conflict can arise if cross-culture sojourners are not aware of what is hidden. The research in this study sets out to describe students' pre-arrival expectations, adjustment during their stay in the UK and the strategies used for this adjustment. The research adopts an ethnographic case study approach; data gathering tools include survey questionnaires, interviews, a research diary, and participant observation in order to achieve triangulation for validity and reliability. The themes were generated through close inspection of texts which were compared to the key concepts within the literature review. This led to identifying categories which emerged out of data but were informed by the reading that I had done earlier. Data are collected and coded in order to detect and describe patterns and themes. This approach takes sometimes a bottom-up, sometimes top-down perspective with the final outcome showing patterns of East Asian students' academic adjustment in the UK, with a particular focus on cross cultural adjustment.

A literature review is carried out about international students' experience and overseas students' adjustment. Some of the key points through the literature are culture, culture change, academic culture, learning strategy and adjustment. From the literature review, I came to realise the importance of my project as this is a field which is under-developed and under-investigated with research dominated by research in the USA. Nevertheless through it I was able to build up a conceptual framework influenced strongly by Makepeace (1989). Pre-arrival expectation and preparation, on arrival problems and adjustment, which include English language skills, sociocultural environment and academic culture, and returning home experience, are identified as key issues. A research methodology chapter describes my research foundation; research design; research approach; sample selection; data collection methods and tools; and data analysis. An opportunity arose when I was appointed as student mentor for pre-session English course students. One of the key issues in the study was the change of focus from ICT into people's experience more generally, and this creates methodological problems which are acknowledged in this chapter. The research project began with East Asian students who attended a pre-session English language course in 2004/5, when participant observation and a research diary were the main data collection tools. After this group of people entered their taught Master's course, survey questionnaires were distributed at the beginning of each term in order to have an overview of participants' experience. Eight case study samples were chosen from the group and rounds of in depth interviews followed each of the three surveys. Data was collected through the methods of interview,

survey questionnaire, research diary, and participant observation under the themes of English language, academic culture and sociocultural environment. Findings were presented under the theoretical framework and research questions identified. Finally, the discussion and conclusion chapters give suggestions to international students, to universities that want to send or recruit international students, to researchers, to people who are doing marketing in higher education, and to anyone who is interested in the internationalisation of higher education.

1.4. Research questions

The research question at the forefront of this project was:

“What is the perspective of East Asian students on their experience of being at Green University?”

This led to specific sub-questions:

- 1) What challenges have international East Asian students had to face at Green University?
- 2) What factors have contributed to or hindered language adjustment for East Asian students in Green University?
- 3) What factors have contributed to or hindered sociocultural adjustment for East Asian students in Green University?
- 4) What factors have contributed to or hindered academic adjustment for East Asian students in Green University?
- 5) What are the strategies that East Asian students could use to facilitate their adjustment to being at Green University?

This thesis contains ten chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction; Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 review the literature, and define the key concepts of this thesis; Chapter 4 explains the research methodology and methods of collecting data. Chapter 5, chapter 6 and chapter 7 present the research findings. The interview and research diary findings are presented partly according to time order and partly under the themes of English language skills, adjustment to academic culture and adjustment to the sociocultural environment. Chapter 8 is a modelling of international students' adjustment experience. Chapter 9 discusses and compares the findings from this research with the literature, and offers possible explanations. Chapter 10 is the conclusion, which includes suggestions on how to adjust to a cross-cultural environment, recommendations to stakeholders and implications for further research.

This chapter has briefly introduced where I started my research interest, how I shifted my research focus, and what my research is about. Then it has introduced the literature review chapter and the key concepts which are important for this thesis. A short introduction to the research methodology chapter has mentioned the key data collection methods, and the approach to analysing the data. A simple review of each chapter has been provided. In order to establish the research context of this study in more detail, now we turn to chapter 2, the literature review.

Chapter 2

Literature review: empirical review

2.1. Introduction

I divided up my review of the literature into two parts. This empirical review section is a literature review of reports of empirical studies, as opposed to discussion of literature that is more concerned with the theoretical issues, which I will discuss in the next chapter. In this chapter firstly I introduce how I carried out my literature review. Secondly, I organise my findings from the empirical review in terms of pre-arrival concerns, on arrival experience and returning home experience. And thirdly I look at English language, academic culture, and the sociocultural environment of student's lives. Lastly I summarise the chapter.

2.2. Searching the empirical studies

I started my literature review through library research. Using the OPAC search engine, I carried out a preliminary search of the topics in the area. I was frustrated because I could not find much at that time. I attended the advanced library skills training sessions organised by the university library and my department. With those skills I was able to locate far more. In searching for this literature, I used snowball strategies (using one paper to lead me to the next) and I carried out systematic searches using databases in the library.

I noted key points emerging from the literature, where it was conducted, and what research methods were used. I noticed that most of the literature was based in America, Australia, or New Zealand, but relatively little from the UK as Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) confirmed. From the limited research that has been done in the UK, I found that most of it was conducted from a marketing perspective. For example, Humfrey (1999) suggested many ways to improve university services for the purpose of attracting more international students. Other limited amounts of research have been done by international student researchers in their unpublished Master's or Ph.D. theses (Leonard and Morley, 2006).

Many problems exist in the unpublished past research regarding the experience of international students in UK higher education (UKCOSA, 2004). These are discussed below:

Firstly, about student samples:

Most of the research focuses on students from one country in one university (e.g. Al-Harthi, 1997), and most of the research puts its focus on current students during a short stay (Gao, 2002). Moreover, most of the research (e.g. Fei, 2002) tends to treat students as a homogeneous group, such as Asian students, Western students.

Secondly, about the research methodology:

Many of the studies adopt conventional methodologies, such as interview and questionnaire survey, few other methods are involved. Few researchers were doing longitudinal work (e.g. Bullen-McKenzie, 1991; Hamid, 1996), so most of the research provides only a “snapshot” of international students’ experience in the UK, and it is still unclear whether students’ performance or behaviour will change after a period of time.

Thirdly, about the theoretical framework:

Agreeing with Walker (1999) who claimed that “international study has been seriously undertheorised in Britain” (p.7), Pelletier (2003) found that “the discourse on international students tends to be rather pragmatic, implicitly positivistic, and ungrounded in any of the educational disciplines” (p.20). Most of the researchers provide a description of international students’ experience only in one institution, and make some recommendations for institutions to improve their service, for international students to make a smooth adjustment. As Pelletier (2003) pointed out, “...the experiences of international students are often examined without consideration of the environment that framed them” (p.20). Furthermore, “...these discussions and initiatives to internationalise higher education provision in the West/UK have been based on surprisingly little, and especially little on the progress and achievement of international students and their subsequent careers and mobilities” (Leonard and Morley, 2003, p.2).

International students, as Walker (1999) argued, “have never been other than a minority interest to academics”. She further argued that in the past the topic

of international students was only connected with the “bleeding hearts” welfare lobby, and nowadays the only interest in international students was marketing research (Walker, 1999, p.7).

I was encouraged to read a Master’s dissertation by a Chinese student (Li, 2004) in my department. Her work is closely related to my topic, the difference being that she focused only on mainland Chinese taught Master’s students. In addition the scale of her work is much smaller than mine because of the time constraints. Nevertheless her work strengthened my motivation to research, and also provided valuable references in my bibliography. At the same time I attended conferences and learned more about research in my area. Talking with people in the conferences was helpful in narrowing down my topic.

In reading the literature (e.g. Houghton and Dickinson, 1992; Ames, 1996), I found that the majority of the research was undertaken using survey questionnaires as the major data collection method. Quantitative research was informative, as the researchers could report on large numbers of people. On the other hand, students’ voices were missing as the researchers did not penetrate more deeply to explore the thoughts and feelings of participants.

Because of the “dearth of research on international students in the UK” (Leonard and Morley, 2006, p .4), I used related literature from other countries to inform my study.

In reading the literature, I found that most of the research focussed on international students' problems, such as psychological, academic, financial and practical issues, as most of the international students met more problems than they expected (e.g. Al-Shawi, 1990; Li, et al, 1997). But much less research focussed on what students found satisfying (e.g. Schutte and Winqvist-Noble, 2006). This may lead to the impression that international students had a miserable life in many of the host countries. This is misleading. In fact many international students are satisfied or partly satisfied with their overseas student experience. I have found from the research (UKCOSA, 2004) that in the UK:

- 1) Around 80% of East Asian participants in a 2004 survey said they were satisfied or very satisfied with their life (UKCOSA, 2004)
- 2) Students were most satisfied with the benefit of "academic experience, improving their English, becoming more independent, meeting people from all over the world and learning about the UK and other cultures" (UKCOSA, 2004).

In 2006, UKCOSA carried out another survey regarding international students' experience in the UK, and the results confirm that the majority of overseas students enjoyed their stay in the UK (UKCOSA, 2006).

In Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) research, international Chinese students did not experience psychological stress, and had little difficulty in socio-cultural adjustment in the UK. Liberman (1994) also found that most of

the Asian international students in America were satisfied with their educational experience.

2.3. Empirical findings

Through the literature, I identified the following key themes and they are chronologically divided into three stages: pre-arrival, on arrival and after arrival.

2.3.1. Pre-arrival concerns

In 2004, Li carried out research into the learning experience of mainland Chinese students at the University of Warwick. She found that before students arrived, over half of them admitted that they were worried about “using academic English, coping with course content, passing examinations and assignments, and getting Master’s degrees” (Li, 2004, p.40). Similarly, while the UKCOSA survey (2006) indicates that international students in general were mainly concerned about accommodation and finance before arriving in the UK, among students whose first language was not English, over 50% were concerned about their English language ability before arrival. As Searle and Ward (1990) argued, much marketing research (e.g. Humfrey, 1999) has been concerned with what sort of information should be provided to students and what sort of preparations students should undertake. But this deals less with realistic expectations and more with aspirations. Cochrane (1983), in contrast, emphasised the importance of realistic expectations for psychological well-being. Moreover, Weissman and Furnham (1987)

suggested that modest expectations facilitate adjustment (p.452). Attitude will also affect the relationship with the host country's people, therefore having an effect on psychological and socio-cultural adjustment (Searle and Ward, 1990, p.453).

2.3.2. On arrival experience

On arrival, students experience "Culture shock". The culture shock "hypothesis" or "concept" implies that "the experience of visiting or living in a new culture is an unpleasant surprise or shock, partly because it is unexpected, and partly because it may lead to a negative evaluation of one's own and /or the other culture" (McNamara & Harris, 1997, p.14). It is found that normally culture shock has negative effects; however, it may be important for self-development and personal growth (McNamara & Harris, 1997, p16). According to Pedersen (1995), a culture shock is likely to happen when:

1. the cues that tell the person how they should behave are missing or are different
2. values that the person considered good, desirable and valuable are not respected by the new culture or are no longer valid
3. the uncertainty of what is expected manifests itself in anxiety, depression and anger
4. dissatisfaction with the new life and beginning to idealize "the way things were" regardless of how bad and uncomfortable their life had been before
5. coping skills which used to work are no longer applicable

6. the sense of uncertainty and misery is permanent and will never go away

Many authors critique the term “culture shock”. They regard culture shock more as an “adjustment stress” (Anderson, 1994) or identity crisis. Being in a new environment and losing the familiar things one used to have, the sojourner would feel anxious and stressed.

U-curve hypothesis

Lysgarrd (1955) suggested that adjustment to a new culture followed a U-shape curve. In most descriptions it includes four stages. The first stage is the “honeymoon stage” when the sojourner is fascinated about everything in the new place. The second stage is the “culture shock stage” (or “disillusionment”) as the individual meets problems but has to deal with them. The third stage is the “adjustment stage” during which the individual has become more familiar with the new culture and has learned how to behave properly in the host culture. The fourth stage is the “mastery stage” when one becomes more integrated into the new culture (Black and Mendenhall, 1991).

As Black and Mendenhall (1991) claim, the U-curve hypothesis is the most frequently used term in cross-cultural adjustment research. However, this hypothesis is also open for debate as many other researchers have found that many sojourners did not follow the U-curve model - instead they adapted in different ways. For example, Anderson (1994) suggests that the sojourner in a new environment may experience a mixture of positive and negative emotions

about the new milieu and does not start from an “easy and successful” stage as the U-curve hypothesis has described.

After reviewing the U-curve literature, Black and Mendenhall (1991) proposed that more careful research needs to be done in this area. To simply either reject or accept the U-curve hypothesis without careful consideration is not appropriate. Agreeing with other researchers (Tanaka, Takai, Kohyama and Fujihara, 1994), Black and Mendenhall (1991) proposed that at the initial stage, the individual may not be able to recognise negative feedback as cues are different from that of the home country and they may lack the experience to recognise them. This may lead to feelings of excitement. This short time is called the “honeymoon stage” in the U-shape curve, but if the above mentioned conditions do not exist, individuals may not experience that exciting stage.

2.3.3. Returning home experience

Compared with the ‘on arrival experience’, the literature on the ‘end of course’ experience is very limited (Martin, 1986). This may be because it is more difficult to collect data after students go back to their home countries. However, Ward et al. (2001) mentioned that most students have re-entry problems after staying overseas for a while. They will experience a re-entry culture shock as familiar things disappear. The typical re-entry problems can be seen as “communicating with friends, dealing with stereotypes, uncertainty

over cultural identity, social withdrawal, and decreased relationship satisfaction” (Ward et al., 2001, p.163).

Another piece of research, carried out by the International Centre for Education in Development, Warwick University (1994), reported that, according to a literature review from North American and Australian sources, most international students did not prepare for a re-entry adjustment, so the number of students who suffered from re-entry problems was much higher than those who had adjustment difficulties on arrival. Many of the students had communicative barriers after they returned to their home country. They felt that what they have learned could not be used easily in the “new” context. The research urged institutions to teach communicative skills for overseas students before their returning home (Maxey and Preston, 1994).

In the literature I also identified types of concerns: language, social-cultural, and academic expectations. Many researchers have attempted to classify international students’ transitional problems when they go to an English-speaking country (for example, Badur, 2003; Makepeace, 1989). Pelletier (2003) claims that “any categorisation is necessarily subjective” (p.9), but she suggests putting students’ problems under the following headings:

- a. *practical challenges such as accommodation* (Badur, 2003);
financial problems, visa problems, weather
- b. *emotional and affective issues such as homesickness, stress,*
counselling, pastoral care

- c. *cross-cultural adaptation and integration such as cultural shock, study shock*
- d. *English language competence such as participation in seminars and lectures, academic writing*
- e. *pedagogical difficulties, such as seminar skills, teaching method, clash of learning style, student role.*

Influenced by Pelletier's categories, I identified the following key themes: language, social-cultural, and academic expectations.

2.3.4. English language

General language problems

For most East Asian students, proficiency in the English language is a key issue, and generally those students have more problems than people from other part of the world. Research by Badur (2003) showed that "Many scholars have stated that English language proficiency is a major factor affecting the adaption of international students to their new environment and their success in college" (p.23). Similarly, Poorshaghghi (1992) indicated that while there was a range of adjustment problems among international students, learning English was the most frequently reported problem area. A similar point is made by Wang (2004). He found that there were a number of issues related to academic adjustment for Chinese students in America; however, language barriers were the area most often mentioned. Language difficulties, together with other problems (such as academic difficulties and psychological problems) may cause serious transitional problems among international

students. In England, a survey which was conducted at the University of York in 2004 identified that language was the most significant problem for international students in the Management Studies Department (Warwick, 2006).

Agreeing with the above, Spaulding and Flack (1976) argued that overseas students' language proficiency has a great effect on their academic performance, social interactions and general adjustment. Many problems which face international students are related to their second language ability (Reinick,1986). Heikinheimo and Shute (2005) argued that language skills, academic issues and social interaction are the most difficult areas in international students' adjustment.

Specific language problems

In academic life, the most serious language problems that face overseas students who wish to participate are "writing academic English, dealing with reading assignments, giving oral presentations, and participating in class discussions" (Tanaka, 2002,p.26). In a similar way, Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) found that "serious problems in understanding lectures, taking notes, answering questions and writing essays were reported by many Asian students" (p.401). From the above mentioned research, it seems that academic writing is one of the most serious English problems for international students.

Academic writing problems

As stated in the previous section (Heikinheimo and Shute, 1986), academic English writing tends to be more difficult for Asian students. Logic is a key issue in academic writing because “Logic which is the basis of rhetoric is evolved out of a culture; it is not universal. Rhetoric, then, is not universal either, but varies from culture to culture and even from time to time within a given culture”. It is affected by “canons of taste within a given culture at a given time” (Kaplan, 1966, p.2).

A foreign student who has mastered the correct sentence structure and grammatical rules may still have a problem in writing logically clear English. The relationship between sequence and rhetoric is important. The delivery of English writing and speaking is regarded as linear in the process of development (Kaplan, 1966).

Kaplan (1966) indicated that the Oriental writing is indirect. The paragraph in this writing can be described as “turning and turning in a widening gyre” (p.10). The Oriental style deals with the subject from different views which seem not directly related to the subject as topic and is developed in terms of what they are not rather than what they are. In most of the Asian countries, the academic way of writing is the oriental style, which begins by writing about a variety of items surrounding a topic sentence before arriving at the main idea which will be stated at the very end. In contrast, English texts follow a more linear approach. The English style of writing usually starts with a topic sentence, and then uses examples and explanations to justify the topic

sentence (Kaplan, 1966). Although both the oriental style and English style of writing are valid, Asian students studying in the UK need to adapt to the English way of writing if their audiences are English (<http://www.eslbee.com>), or more precisely if they are being assessed within academic conventions of an English University as the reader .

Language learning strategies

The value of strategy instruction is to help learners broaden their view and take advantage of a wide range of learning strategies from which they can choose in different situations. Past research has explored participants' learning strategies (e.g. Schneider & Fujishima 1995; Graham 1997) in and outside the classroom. For example, Bedell & Oxford (1996:58) claim that culture or ethnicity directly influences language learners' choice of learning strategy as they often, though not always, "behave in certain culturally approved and socially encouraged ways as they learn". Oxford (1990) developed a language learning strategy system, where she divided strategies into direct and indirect groups. She classified memory strategies, cognitive strategies and compensation strategies as direct strategies; while metacognitive strategies, affective strategies and social strategies were classified as indirect strategies. Insufficient employment of effective learning strategies contributes to weak language learning performance though Pride (1979) argued that strategies are not necessarily good in themselves as any strategy can lead to failure. The time, the way and amount of using strategies is more important.

In a case study which was carried out by Schneider and Fujishima (1994), the subject Zhang (a fictitious name) relied on behavioural strategies to complete his assignments: he was punctual, attentive in class, and conscientious in completing assignments; he planned carefully before writing, and allowed time to rewrite. Unfortunately, Zhang experienced only limited success in his language learning. One reason, corresponding with Lightbown's (2003) classroom research, was "practice does not make perfect". In other words as Lightbown (2003) found "knowing a language rule does not mean one will be able to use it in communicative interaction" (p.6). As Anderson (1985) stated, the three stages of skill acquisition in adult learning are cognitive, associative, and autonomous; knowing a language rule is just the first stage of skill acquisition, and there is still a long way to master the skill fully. In Zhang's case, a shortage of effective learning strategies contributed to his final failure.

Communicative competence

Alred et al. (2003) claimed that by nature human beings are social and it is in the interaction with others that individuals are understood and educated. In a similar way, Schild (1962) found that study abroad primarily occurred through observation, participation and communication. Besides linguistic rules, overseas students clearly require effective communicative competence in the real environment. Agreeing with this, many researchers (e.g. Piaget, 1956; Gudykunst, 1994; Byram, 2000, cited in Geoghegan 2007) stated that language learning involves accuracy and the ability to use the language appropriately.

For cross-cultural travellers, like international postgraduate students in this research, some researchers (e.g. Searle and Ward, 1990) claimed that their “relationship with members of the target culture” is one of the criteria to see whether they have adjusted to the new environment successfully or not. If we agree with this opinion, the level of sojourners’ communicative competence, their attitude toward the new place and the environment around them are key variables for cross-cultural integration. Yet in relation to the matter of communicative competence, researchers hold different views.

In Canale and Swain’s (1980) opinion, communicative competence minimally includes grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. They regarded these three competences as foundational when learning a second language. Without mastering them, the second language learner cannot be said to achieve mastery of the language.

In respect to grammatical competence, they explained that this should include elements such as lexical items, rules of morphology, syntax patterns, and phonology. All the elements are equally important in grammatical competence, for they provide the learners with the knowledge of how to determine and express the literal meaning accurately.

As to sociolinguistic competence, Canale and Swain (1980) agreed with Hymes (1972) that this explains ways in which utterances are produced and understood in relation to specific purposes. Firstly it is about the content, in terms of what kind of content should be appropriate within a given contextual

factor; secondly, it is about the extent to which appropriate attitudes and registers or style are conveyed within a given socio-cultural context. Another aspect of sociolinguistic competence is the rules of discourse, thought of in terms of cohesion, and coherence of groups of utterance.

According to Canale and Swain (1980), strategic competence includes the ability to paraphrase grammatical forms that one has not mastered or cannot recall at the moment, and understanding how to address strangers when unsure of their social status. They say that little work has been done on this. Nevertheless, they emphasised that strategic competence is most suitable for beginners in their second language learning, and they are more likely to acquire strategic competence in real-life communication, rather than in classroom practice.

Just as Faerch et al. (1984) combine grammatical competence, phonological competence, and lexical competence together and classify them in the single category of linguistic competence, Canale and Swain (1980) think it is very important to provide the link between linguistic competence and actual language use in specific situations. They name it pragmatic competence and discourse competence, and think all of them belong to pragmatic competence.

A new idea from Faerch et al. (1984) is that fluency, which is speakers' ability to express what they want to say with ease, is another component of communicative competence. In addition, besides the above various types of "knowledge" which the individual must possess, they claimed that learners

should also develop their metacommunicative awareness, which refers to a learner's conscious knowledge about components of communicative competence, their interdependence and social functions.

Agreeing with most of the above ideas, more recently, Byram (2003, p.62) developed a 5-dimensional model of intercultural communicative competence:

1. *attitude*: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own
2. *knowledge*: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction
3. *skills of interpreting and relating*: the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own
4. *skills of discovery and interaction*: the ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practice and the ability to utilise knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction
5. *critical cultural awareness/political education*: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries

Furthermore, Byram (1997) suggested there are three places to acquire intercultural communicative competence in educational settings. They are:

- a. classroom

- b. fieldwork (in fieldwork, there is a pedagogical structure and educational objectives determined by the teacher often in consultation with learners)
- c. independent learning

One study to support Byram's idea in practice is from Geoghegan (2007). At her working place (Bournemouth University, UK), she found that Byram's ICC (intercultural communicative competence) dimensions can be translated into learning outcomes. In her case study, the language centre developed a self-managed learning scheme to develop students' communicative skills and culture awareness. The independent learning scheme was very successful.

Though arguments vary, communicative competence is a very important concept and often includes linguistic competence, pragmatic or sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, fluency and metacommunicative awareness. For a sojourner, the higher his/her communicative competence, the better the chance of integrating into the new milieu.

Finally, a sense of proportion is needed as it is all too easy simply to categorise all of the problems as language problems, Hawkey and Nakornchai (1980) claimed that "Thus a problem of attitude difference, not understood by teachers because of their lack of familiarity with a cultural background of particular learners, may lead them to highlight language problems as the major cause of lack of communication when the real reasons may be different" (Hawkey and Nakornchai, 1980, p.78).

2.3.5. Sociocultural adjustment

According to Searle and Ward (1990), the socio-cultural component refers to the “ability to ‘fit in’ and to negotiate interactive aspects of the new culture” (p.450). They think that the mastery of social skills is a linear process. Spencer-Batey and Xiong also (2006) stated that “sociocultural adaptation concerns people’s sense as to how well they can ‘fit in’ to the new environment” (p.38). This is the sense followed here.

Daily life

As Spencer-Batey and Xiong (2006) mentioned, the main aspect of international Chinese students’ daily life is their accommodation as they spend much time there. Another piece of research (Houghton and Dickinson, 1992), which focused on a range of international students from various countries, indicated that the British cold, wet, windy and changeable weather was a challenge for students. The older the students, the more likely complaints would arise. Food was a problem for 27% at the beginning of their stay but the percentage identifying this as a problem decreased with time (Houghton and Dickinson, 1992). It is a challenge for many international Chinese students to cope with life when they have to face many difficulties, such as dealing with the noise in the accommodation, coping with an independent life style, and having interesting conversations with English hosts by themselves (Spencer-Batey and Xiong, 2006).

Social interaction

This is another important aspect for socio-cultural adjustment as it relates to language adjustment, friendship, opportunities to learn other cultures. As Walker (1999) argued, themes like “cultural discontinuity, the pressures of the sojourn abroad; mental ill-health amongst overseas students; culture shock; and issues relevant to psychology, psychotherapy and counselling” (p.9-10) are all important issues for international students’ socio-cultural adaptation.

Nevertheless problems with local customs were not significant in Houghton and Dickinson’s (1992) research. This was probably because many of the students just focused on campus or university life in a wider context while interaction with the local community was not frequent and not seen as significant.

Zeng (1997) carried out a survey of 135 students from mainland China at eighteen universities on their experience of UK academic life and found that most of the mainland Chinese students’ social activities were restricted to leisure reading, watching TV, going to the cinema and listening to music; or travelling, visiting churches and cathedrals; some of them also visited museums, galleries and exhibitions. The Chinese students whom she researched often did not feel the need to go and mix with British people. Financial difficulties, different cultural perceptions and language barriers were the major reasons for them choosing such types of social activities, which tend to be less socially interactive.

Though many international students are aware that social interaction becomes important and is a key to socio-cultural adjustment as it supports language adjustment, friendship, opportunities to learn other cultures, the degree of social interaction with local people is normally low. For example, the UKCOSA survey (2004) reports that “students from East and South-East Asia were considerably less likely to have UK friends than the average and [than were] students from the EU” (p.12). This may partly be due to the character of British culture. As pub culture is still central in the new century in British people’s life (Storry and Child, 2002), many international students claim that it is hard to be close with local people if they do not drink (UKCOSA survey, 2004). As the dominant medium for cultural exchange in British is TV (Storry and Child, 2002), also because of language barriers and financial concerns (TV licence) many international students do not watch TV. This may constrain students in communicating with local people as well because they have no TV information to exchange. Instead, they may find it is much easier to make friends with other international students who are in the same situation as them.

The UKCOSA survey (2006) again confirmed the above findings though student samples shifted from students in higher education to students in further education. They reported that compared with students of other nationalities, East Asian students are more likely to make friends from their co-nationals. This is partly from their own choice, partly due to the constraints of the environment (such as few opportunities to meet people from other nations). The above findings have been backed up by other researchers. For example, Houghton and Dickinson (1992) found that it is much easier for

Asian students to interact with other Asian students as they share a similar culture, and feel more comfortable when speaking English with them. In Houghton and Dickinson's (1992) research, almost all the students make contact with other overseas students as they "reported feelings of isolation, difficulties in meeting home students, and difficulties in finding real friends" (p.46).

In a similar way, in Spencer-Batey and Xiong's (2006) research, the social contact with co-national friends (Chinese) provided emotional and practical help. Overall this group of Chinese students had no problem in dealing with their daily life, but they had frustrations with their social interaction. They did not like the British pub culture, and appealed for varieties of social activities (Spencer-Batey and Xiong, 2006). Bailey's (2006) study further confirmed that suffering from the pressure of study, from financial constraints and from the availability of preferred leisure activities, international students' leisure life is poor in the UK.

Financial issues

According to UKCOSA survey 2004 and UKCOSA survey 2006, the majority of international students are self-funded. The high living expense and tuition fee is a heavy burden for some students who are from developing countries. To find a paid, part time job is a desire for many international students. Financial concern is often an ambiguous situation as some students gained valuable working experience from their part time job; however, some students admitted that lack of money constrained their social circle as they did not want to pay extra. A report from the BBC (2006) claims that students who have to

do a paid part time job to make their living tend to enjoy less social events, and are less likely to be academically outstanding. Similarly, Bamford et al. (2002) have found that because of high fees, high living expenses in London and the relatively short duration of British MA course, international students in their study had the pressure of studying intensively.

Based on the above review, the key findings from the present literature are:

- International students have effective strategies to cope with their daily life.
- Most international Asian students have only limited contact with the local community. It is found that they are less likely to have UK friends as most of their friends are Asian students.

2.3.6. Academic adjustment

To make an academic adjustment is crucial for international students because to obtain an excellent degree or good grade is the most significant goal for them (Bailey, 2006). An example of the reaction of international students to the British educational system can be seen from Bailey's (2006) study, which reported that one international student "felt that the UK study environment was more 'relaxed', allowing him time to reflect on what he was learning...at the same time, the UK system could cause initial difficulties for students who were used to a structured timetable and guidance from teachers" (p.14).

Gilbert (2006) reported that "students who do not have the language, literacy and learning experience required for managing in the very typical higher

educational environment espoused by UK universities face critical barriers to success on their chosen programme” (p.56). On the other hand, Burns (1991) claimed that compared to local students, international students have more problems adjusting to academic expectations, for example with respect to study methods, participation, independent learning and language skills.

Besides new learning styles and students’ roles, international students also need to face a new student-staff relationship. In Asia, the tradition is that knowledge is not open to challenge and criticism, and that academic education has little to do with the beginning of discovering wisdom, or forming the development of a relatively autonomous thought process. To raise questions, to criticise or analyse does not feature strongly in teaching or learning (Ballard, 1987, p.114). The result is that Asian students show a lot of respect, at least outwardly, for their tutors; they dare not challenge their teachers; and in many countries students and teachers have a very strict hierarchical relation. However, when Asian students come to a Western country, they find that student and teacher relate to each other more informally: they usually call each other by their first name, and students are expected to socialise with their tutors, which can be strange or embarrassing at the beginning (Lowes et al., 2004, p.298).

On the contrary, the research has found that in Western education, knowledge is “gained and extended through critical analysis, by individuals working with increasing independence”, “and the Socratic method (i.e. the method of teaching in which the master imparts no information but asks a

sequence of questions, through answering which the pupil eventually comes to the desired knowledge) is the ideal teaching style” (Ballard, 1987, p.114). Consequently, tutors encourage independent thinking, though normally they would not tell you how to do this or be explicit about the strategies one can use. The Western higher education system has a much less structured nature compared with many Asian countries. Many Asian students who are used to obeying their tutor’s guidance, who still “revere and have high expectation of tutors” (Channell, 1990, p.64), feel lost when they try to approach their tutors but get only general advice. Next, I will look at this more closely in two aspects of academic adjustment.

Subject related

Brew (1980) found that in the Open University’s courses (in the UK) foreign students can perform better than British students in mathematically based courses; however, they suffered with difficulties on the courses which have descriptive and discursive components, such as Business management (Brew, p.124). Meanwhile, Hawkey and Nakornchai (1980) carried out a research project regarding Thai students studying in the UK and found that in science there was more overlap between subject content in Thailand and the UK. On the other hand arts students needed more time to catch up with the background knowledge required for understanding the course, so they were disadvantaged from the beginning. Furthermore, Brew (1980) suggested that for overseas students taking courses with a great amount of descriptive component, language ability has a “marked effect on performance” (Brew, 1980, p124).

Brew (1980) stated that the Education system in the UK is different from many other countries, as classes are smaller and teachers put more emphasis on students. Furthermore, the orientation of education is different. One student described the difference as:

“The education system here is different in approach. We are more regimental—very examination orientated, and that’s bad. I think what is being taught here is the correct attitude towards study. A kind of academic development... For us it’s more goal-orientated- you’re aiming for certain things and you’re going to get it, even if you slog 16 hours a day. Back home the competition is fantastic... Here (the emphasis) is more on development of your thinking — concepts. I think it is the right approach to education, because when you go out, it’s not how many marks you get, it’s how well you can handle the situation, and if you’ve got a rotten way of thinking, a rotten attitude... Back home, they look first at your credentials and afterwards at how you work” (Brew, 1980, p.121).

Brew (1980) noticed that the extent to which students discussed work and study varied according to different cultural norms. For example, Chinese students preferred to discuss course material in their own language with their close peers. But some other students never discussed their course with fellow students at all. It is generally reported that overseas students often appear to be silent in class. There are two reasons suggested for this. Firstly some are not confident in their own ability to express their meaning clearly in English. Secondly they are not sure about the appropriate cultural norms in the new context, as they did not know which questions were suitable to ask (Brew,

1980, p.121). Other reasons, such as having been taught to be quiet and obedient in the class, or a concern to avoid showing off in public were found in a group of international Thai students (Hawkey and Nakornchai, 1980). In a similar way, Heikinheimo and Shute (1986) claimed that lack of English language ability, together with shyness and a pattern of apparent passivity in the classroom setting impede Southeast Asian students' classroom participation.

New expectations at a British university

International students are not only linguistically but also culturally challenged in that they need to find out new cultural expectations. They need to know what it means to be a student in that university, and seek cues to enable them to behave appropriately (Brew, 1980).

Brew (1980) also argued that individuals' view of learning and knowledge in the new environment will be influenced by their past learning experience. For example students who are from an examination oriented education system will hold different views from students who are from an educational system that is grounded on expanding their thinking. Watt (1980) claimed that in the UK ideally the ranking of rationale for learning is:

1. personal self development
2. mastery of useful career skills and knowledge
3. gaining a certificate

He stated that the above ideas are the main influences on the learning approach in the UK though in practice it digresses sometimes. Conversely overseas' students' first aim is to gain their certificate, and then they may want to know practical skills to gain a good job. Personal self development is the least important thing for them. Furthermore, Watt (1980) argued that if an individual gives priority to personal development, he or she works for himself and can engage in learning at a deeper level. But those whose first target is to gain a certificate, may work for others (such as their family, relatives) so understanding can become somewhat superficial or at least strategic.

The key findings in this section are:

- Because of differences such as attitude towards knowledge, expectation of learning and student-tutor relationship, Asian students feel the pressure of academic adjustment. This may be experienced differently by students of different subjects.

2.4. Summary

In this chapter, I carried out an empirical review of the literature that examines the experience of international students in overseas countries. Because the research in this area, in the UK, is relatively limited, I also looked at students' experience in the context of other countries. In this chapter first I gave a brief introduction to how I started my literature review, where I identified my key themes, and in what way I had organised them. Secondly I presented my empirical findings from literature in two ways. The first way was in

chronological order: pre-arrival, on arrival and returning home experience. The second way was by key themes: English language skills, academic culture and sociocultural adjustment.

In the next section I will look at the conceptual difficulties arising from the review in this chapter.

Chapter 3

Literature review: theoretical review

3.1. Introduction

The empirical review presented in chapter two revealed several frequently recurring concepts which need to be explained in more detail. Hence, this theoretical review chapter looks at literature that is concerned with the concepts of culture, academic culture, and adjustment to understand better the underlying meaning from the empirical literature which I reviewed in chapter two.

3.2. Concept of culture

This work raises many issues about the concept of culture, the concept of adjustment, and the idea of an individual within a culture. As Cortazzi and Jin (1999) and Kachru (1999) claim, the term culture has different meanings in different disciplines. For example, Tylor (1871) wrote that "culture or civilization, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society". Similarly, Kneller (1965) gave the definition that "Culture is the 'total shared way of life of a given people, comprising their modes of thinking, acting and feeling, which are expressed, for instance, in religion, law, language, art, and custom, as well as in material products such as houses, clothes, and tools'" (Kneller 1965,p.4).

Both Kneller and Tylor (1871) mentioned that culture refers to ways of everyday life, comprising the modes of people's thinking, acting and feeling; however Kneller did not include literature, music or art in culture. Rather, Brooks (1964) mentioned the historical shift in the meaning of the word "culture". He stated that "...at heart it bears the simple domestic notion of growth in animals and plants. It was long ago extended by metaphor to apply to persons subjects to education and training, and in the nineteenth century it was recognized as bearing not only the absolute meaning of refinement of mind, taste, and manners in an individual, but also of intellectual attainments, especially as exemplified in the relics of artistic endeavour, representing whole phases of a civilization" (p.83). Then Brooks (1964) stated that in the twentieth century, the social scientists gave a third meaning to culture: "the sum of all the learned and shared elements that characterize a societal group" (p.83). For this third meaning, culture came to be used in the plural, and was used as identification with particular national and ethnic groups (Jackson, 1997).

Agreeing with Kneller (1965) and Brooks (1964), Tomalin and Stempleski (1993) argue that culture has a double meaning, of both "achievement culture", and "behaviour culture". In more general terms, they refer to this as "culture with a Capital C"—art, music, literature, history and so on—and "culture with a small c"—the behavioural patterns and lifestyles of everyday people. Some people also use the term "surface culture" and "deep culture" (Guirdham, 1999). As Guirdham (1999) claims, "**surface** culture consists of the things which are obviously different to visitors to a foreign country—

differences in dress, things people eat or their music, gestures and artefacts plus more subtle things such as norms and roles. The elements of surface culture can be summarised as its shared symbols” (p.48). Surface culture is the small “c” culture in Tomalin and Stempleski’s culture dimension.

On the other hand, deep culture “is the hidden part that cannot be accessed directly by the human sensory organs. It is ‘any of the customs, worldview, language, kinship systems, social organisation and other taken-for-granted day-to-day practices of a people which set that group apart as a distinctive group.... Deep culture is not only hard for outsiders to see, it is also a fluid, multidimensional process and a woefully complex, maddeningly dynamic phenomenon that does not lend itself easily to casual analysis” (Guirdham, 1999,p.50). Deep culture has the same meaning as big “C” culture which we discussed before. When cross-cultural sojourners (international students in this research) first go to a new place, they can instantly feel that they are alien from seeing local people’s dress, tasting their food or listening to their music (surface culture), but it may take them some time to understand the deeply embedded cultural values that give rise to the taken for granted daily rules and customs (deep culture).

Because the participants in this research were from mainland China, Taiwan, South Korea, Japan and Thailand, they were representing their regional cultures respectively. However, these regions can also be called “East Asia”, where their cultures have many similarities. The culture we discussed in this research is **anthropological culture**, which is, broadly speaking, “the ways in

which one group or society of humans live that are different from the ways in which other groups live.” (Guirdham,1999, p.48). In this thesis, agreeing with most of the above discussed characteristics, the term culture mainly refers to the small “c” culture, which is the “ways of everyday life”. As explanations of cultures vary, there is a general understanding that

“culture consists of shared elements that ‘establish frameworks for perceiving, believing, evaluating, communicating and acting among people who share a language, historic periods and geographic location’” (Brook,2001).

From this definition I use culture as a framework to interpret my participants’ “actions, words, and patterns of thinking” (Cortazzi and Jin,1999, p.197).

3.2.1. Cultural differences

Individualism and Collectivism at a cultural level

Individualism refers to a tendency to value the individual identity over the group identity; it emphasises personal goals rather than group goals in communication. Collectivism, in contrast, refers to the tendency to emphasise “we” rather than “I”, and to emphasise group goals and needs over individual ones (Ting-Toomey,1994). Such a different goal emphasis leads to different styles of emotional display. Members of collectivistic cultures tend to express feelings that will promote harmony, cohesion and cooperation and are less tolerant of individual variations. Members of individualistic cultures, with their

emphasis on individual goals, tend to allow a wider range of emotional display (Matsumoto, 1991).

High context culture- Low context culture

The low/high context cultural continuum focuses on the individual's communication behaviour (Hall, 1976; Porter and Samovar, 1994). Hall (1976, p.76) argues that in a high-context interaction pattern "most of the information is either physical or internalised in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message". Whereas in the low-context interaction "the mass of information is vested in the explicit code" (Hall, 1976, p.76).

In a high context culture community (such as Japanese, Arab and Mediterranean) people are more integrated with their family, friends and colleagues. So they do not need or expect much detailed background information in daily life. For example, Takanashi (2004) found that in Japan, communication is largely based on the listener's inference of the speaker's real wishes and intention, on what has been said and what has not been said. A Japanese person who relies heavily on literal interpretation and logic can be regarded as "verbose, argumentative, simplistic and sometimes slow" (Shelley, 1993, p.118, cited in Takanashi, 2004).

Conversely, low-context people have a much looser relationship with the community around them in everyday life. Therefore every time when, for example, Americans and Germans communicate with others they need

detailed background information (Hall and Hall, 1990). When people from a high context culture meet with individuals from a low context culture, if both of them are unaware of the cultural differences and behave in their learnt ways, problems may arise. High-context people may feel annoyed if being given too much irrelevant information by low context people. On the other hand, low-context individuals may have a sense of loss if they have not been provided with enough information (Hall and Hall, 1990).

Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

After analysing a survey of over 100,000 employees from IBM in more than 70 countries between the years 1967 and 1973, Hofstede (2001) presented his famous four culture dimensions (the fifth dimension, of long term orientation, was developed later) to understand cultural differences. It is perhaps one of the most significant studies, which uses the approach of "seeing all human beings as having varying degrees of particular personality traits" (Louie, 2005, p.19). This approach, as Louie (2005) argued, can provide a general understanding of people from different backgrounds. Though some people may be inclined to believe that Hofstede's (2001) classification system is too detailed and thus has a tendency to over generalization, and that it may not apply to people who are not in the workplace, these categories have been proved to be helpful for many other researchers (e.g. Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006; Takanashi, 2004). The five dimensions of culture are as follows:

1. Power Distance Index: a society's power level of inequality is accepted by everybody. e.g. in Japan, younger people need to respect older

people; individuals with lower status need to be polite to individuals with higher status (Takanashi, 2004).

2. Individualism vs. Collectivism: the degree to which the individual is integrated into groups. In an individualist dominant society, the individual puts priority on himself/herself, or family (husband, wife and children). A collectivist culture puts group interest first as they think that the individual has belonged to one or more groups since birth.
3. Masculinity vs. Femininity: the distribution of roles between the genders which is fundamental for a society.
4. Uncertainty Avoidance: this is about a society's tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity. People within an uncertainty avoidance society are nervous about unstructured, unclear or unpredictable circumstances so they maintain "strict codes of behaviour and a belief in absolute truths" (Hofstede, 1986, p.308).
5. Long-Term Orientation vs. Short-Term Orientation: "long term orientations are thrift and perseverance, short term orientations are respect for tradition, fulfilling social obligations and protecting one's 'face'".

An overview of Asian countries using the 5-dimensions as criteria

In general, Asian countries have a high score of long term orientation (over 80%), a high level of uncertainty avoidance (over 60%), but a low level of individualism (around 20%).

The overview of the UK under the 5-dimensions

As compared to Asian countries, the UK has a low level of long term orientation (around 20%), a comparatively low level of uncertainty avoidance (around 30%), but a high level of individualism (over 80%).

Hofstede's 5-dimension scores with specific countries

Thailand has a high ranking in power distance (around 60%) and uncertainty avoidance (around 60%).

South Korea has a high level of uncertainty avoidance score (around 80%) and long term orientation score (around 70%), but a low level of individualism (around 12%).

China has a very high long term orientation score (around 95%), a low level of individualism (around 10%), a high score in power distance (over 70%).

Japan a Buddhist-Shinto society, has a high score in long term orientation, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity tradition.

Taiwan has a high score of long term orientation (over 80%) and uncertainty avoidance (over 60%), but a low level of individualism (around 10%).

Hofstede's five cultural dimensions are helpful in helping us understand how values differ in each community though his dimensions were initially designed for people in the workplace. Some research has found that some part of his model can be generalized to other contexts. For example, Merkin (2006) carried out research to see whether Hofstede's Uncertainty Avoidance dimension of culture is effective in predicting national differences. Her work confirmed that the model could be generalized and used in her research context, though this does not mean that the model is suitable for all contexts.

One caveat about using models of this kind is that they are of limited use in explaining individual differences. Culture is not static nor is it homogenous. People from the same cultural background behave differently for various reasons related to individual circumstance. For example, Louie (2005) noticed that "in practice... the student whose parents are professors from Shanghai is going to carry a very different baggage to one whose parents are peasants from a village in Hunan" (p.23). Hanson (1992) suggests that although people from the same background may share tendencies, there are still many individual variables, such as educational background, gender, living environment and identification with a particular culture, which may also affect one's cultural practice. This explains why people from the same region share many similarities, but they are also different from each other (Yeh, 2001). Similarly, Hall and Hall (1990) state that individuals have their own needs within each culture, so while each is different, it is still helpful to know the culture to which an individual belongs, since everyone is influenced by their context (Hall and Hall, 1990). Yeh (2001) claims that culture features give

people idea of “national stereotype” which is a general impression of people from the same region or national. For example, we always say that Japanese people are polite, Chinese people are hard working, American people are open-minded. However, this kind of “national stereotype” can only apply as a framework, a “generalised descriptor” (Louie, 2005, p.23) for our understanding, as underneath national culture, there are also many subdivisions (Yeh, 2001). Hanson (1992) suggests that culture can be seen as “a framework through which actions are filtered or checked as individuals go about daily life” (Hanson, 1992, p.3). Louie (2005) proposed that “knowing the cultures well means the awareness that within all cultures, there are changes, contradictions and ambiguities. Difference occurs not just *between*, but also *within*, cultures. The only constant is that nothing stays the same” (p. 24).

To make the picture more complex, the same individual will behave differently in different contexts. For example, a person might behave in a deferential way at work yet become aggressive and overbearing as member of a family group. Furthermore, the cultural values which were dominant 40 years ago within a regional or national group may fade away as time goes on. As Kachru (1999) said “Culture is not static; it evolves as people conduct their daily lives” (p.77).

For example, this is widely reported as a trend in China where traditional deference to power is declining and, even in matters such as environment and attitudes to animals, cultural norms and values have been changing. Many people are more concerned about cruelty to animals, in a way that they never

were before. They have been exposed to Western values, which, to some extent have made them different types of people. This leads us to think about the relationship of the individual to culture.

3.2.2. The importance of understanding cultural differences

Bredella (2003) states that we grow up with the belief that our culture is natural and superior to others. Being intercultural disappoints this self-admiring and makes us realize that “how we are shaped by our culture just as others are shaped by theirs” (Bredella, 2003, p.226). Alred et al. (2003) argue that being intercultural requires us to be aware of the experience of other culture groups and to acquire the ability to analyse the experience and act upon it.

Hall and Hall (1990) liken culture to a big, complex but delicate computer. The actions and responses of a human being in every day life are guided by the computer programme. The computer programme will crash if mistakes occur, e.g., “people unconsciously apply their own rules to another system” (Hall and Hall, 1990, p.4). In other words, if a man from one culture interpreted people from other cultures according to his rules; surprise, confusion or even shock would be the result. On the other hand, Louie (2005) warned teachers that culturally inappropriate classroom interaction may happen because of stereotypes of international students.

3.2.3. Cultural distance

The previous sections discussed the concepts of culture, the dimensions of culture, and the importance of understanding cultural distance. In this section I will identify cultural distance, which is one of the important variables in sociocultural adjustment.

Ward et al. (2001) mentioned that cultural distance (i.e. the perceived discrepancy between culture of origin and culture of contact) was one of the most important variables to affect sociocultural adaptation (p.42). Research has found that cultural distance and adjustment difficulties are closely related. The new arrivals who are more culturally distant are more likely to suffer from stress and discomfort as they know fewer cultural skills in daily life (Searle and Ward, 1990). Searle and Ward (1990) also suggested that the more the cultural distance, the greater life change would be involved, and the more sociocultural adjustment problems may arise. Using *Hofstede's 5-dimensions* of culture we are able to identify a marked difference in the culture of the UK and Asian cultures.

Long term orientation: 80% (Asian) vs. 20% (UK)

Uncertainty avoidance: 60% (Asian) vs. 30% (UK)

Individualism: 20% (Asian) vs. 80% (UK)

3.2.4. Religion

Similar to cultural distance, religious belief has been regarded as another important variable in cross-cultural adaptation.

In the past 2,000 years, China and many other Asian cultures have been influenced by the “three teachings” of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. They have been merged into every aspect of Asian life (Chan, 1992).

3.2. Academic culture

After discussing the concept of culture in the above section, this part looks at academic culture.

In this research, as discussed in the earlier part of this chapter, the reference to culture generally refers to the small “c”, anthropological, culture. Accordingly, an academic culture is a culture that is dominant within one academic group, and which makes it different from other academic group. One definition of academic cultures is that:

“Academic cultures are the systems of beliefs, expectations and cultural practices about how to perform academically” (Cortazzi and Jin, 1999, p.77).

When students from Asia (the East) enter a society in the West, they need to make adjustments as academic differences exist. These are discussed below.

3.3.1. Socratic culture vs. Confucian Culture

The difference in academic culture between East and West might be explained from the perspective of a Socratic culture and Confucian culture dichotomy, as many scholars believe that the West has been more influenced by Socratic culture, whereas the East has been more influenced by Confucian culture.

The Socratic argues the “view of education was that its goal should be not efficiency and power but a search for knowledge and understanding”. Socratics regard the teacher as the midwife in education who helps students to give birth to brilliant ideas. On the other hand, a Confucian thinks that educator is more like a messenger who passes brilliant ancient knowledge and wisdom to students. Therefore in the Confucian culture influenced classroom, the teacher is more like a role model who helps students to develop their talents and answers their questions. Efficiency and power are regarded as important elements of Confucian culture.

Because Confucian culture regards the teacher as the messenger of past knowledge, the teacher always encourages students to read textbooks to seek truth. In contrast Socratic cultures encourage students to use spoken argument to look for knowledge and understanding. This probably explains why Western education uses oral dissertation defences and other forms of oral examination in their assessment system but in the East teachers always want to assess whether students have learned the knowledge by heart or not.

Confucian culture might have an impact upon Asian people’s attitudes toward ability and effort as well. For example, Rogers (1998) found that the collectivist Chinese people believe that everything can be achieved by effort and hard work. On the other hand, Western students may assume that “without a given level of ability no amount of effort will be sufficient” (Rogers, 1998, p279). Other researchers (e.g. Robertson, 2000; Yeung and Tung

1996; Yang 1986; Chen 2001) also indicate that Confucian culture favours efforts, hard work and endurance. Efforts always accompany the Confucian methods of education and learning (Chen, 2001).

3.3.2. 'Dialectic learning' vs. 'Dialogic learning'

As Elsey (1990) stated, overseas students want to return home 'with the inner satisfaction and the outward measure of successful academic achievement' (p.47). However, there are, or at least have traditionally been, different understandings regarding knowledge and learning style in the East and West. For example, Holmes (2005) felt that Chinese culture embodied the belief that success came from effort and willpower rather than ability, so Chinese education emphasises memorisation and rote learning, which is called 'dialectic learning'. In contrast, western education, which is called 'dialogic learning', starts from the premise that success comes from ability. Therefore students are encouraged to ask questions, challenge the ideas of teachers and other students, and express their own ideas and so on. Not surprisingly students who are used to 'dialectic learning' can feel very uncomfortable when they have to face a 'dialogic learning' environment. Consequently, many Asian students are reported as 'quiet' in the classroom, and they are seen as not contributing to seminars or group discussions, let alone challenging their teachers or peers.

Assessment and institutional evaluation systems are also new to many international students. At home, most Asian students just expect to take an examination at the end of the term, while in many Western countries,

international students explain that the holistic methods of assessment that they encounter are unfamiliar, and they feel uncomfortable with the idea of using multiple criteria to determine their grade (Badur,2003).

3.4. Adjustment

This part explores the concept of adjustment. For example, Shaffer and Shoben (1956) defined adjustment as “referring to the reduction or satisfaction of short term drives” (cited from Anderson, 1994, p.300). The adjustment involves a working process between a person and an environment toward a fit (French, Rodgers and Cobb 1974). The sojourner will be influenced by the demands from the surrounding environment but the environment would also provide chances to satisfy a person’s need. There are many criteria in literature about adjustment, such as “acceptance of the host culture, satisfaction, feelings of acceptance” (Brislin, 1981). Agreeing with some of the aforementioned opinions, Black and Stephens (1989) state three domains for intercultural adjustment, which are presented as

- a. general adjustment (managing daily life)
- b. interaction adjustment (relating effectively to host nationals)
- c. work adjustment (accomplishment of work-related objectives)

For full time international students, their main work is study. Though they may do some paid part time job, academic study is still their main work. In this sense their work adjustment and general adjustment bears heavily on their academic adjustment. Interaction adjustment, which is their contact with the host culture, is a part to their sociocultural adjustment.

Another concept put forward by Searle and Ward (1990) is that there are two dimensions of adjustment. One is the psychological dimension, when the sojourner, if adjusted, feels well-being and satisfaction; the other is the socioculture dimension when, if the individual can “fit in” and negotiate the interactive aspect of the new culture, they feel more comfortable and at ease. These two cross-cultural adjustment dimensions have been widely accepted by many researchers (Yang, Noels and Saumure, 2006; Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006).

What type of adjustment could be regarded as successful adjustment? Much of the existing research has pointed to a wide range of measures. After discussing the many models of successful transition, Ward et al. (2001) claimed that “A common theme running through all of these models is the recognition that psychological well-being and satisfaction as well as effective relationships with members of the new culture are important components of adaptation for cross-cultural travellers”(p.43).

After Ward and her colleagues presented the two dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment, Anderson (1994) presented a cross-cultural adaptation model which includes six general principles. These are:

- a. it involves adjustment
- b. it implies learning
- c. it implies a stranger-host relationship
- d. it is cyclical, continuous, interactive

- e. it is relative
- f. it implies personal development

Anderson (1994) claims that adjustment is just a process of overcoming and solving problems in the new situation. It is dependent on the individuals to choose the way in which they adapt, therefore they can create their own adjustments. Anderson (1994) also mentions that in the process of adjustment, an individual has four ways to react to the problems which arise from the new environment. These are: changing oneself, changing the environment, not doing anything, or running away. If the individual wants to overcome the obstacles by changing self or the environment, they need some “engine” to push them further. According to Anderson (1994), these “engines” could be

- a. a willingness to open oneself up to new cultural influences
- b. a willingness to face obstacles head-on by the use of instrumental strategies
- c. a resolve not to run away

(Anderson, 1994, p.313)

Another “engine” that can promote cross-cultural adjustment, according to Lynch (1992) is to take a risk, to have a flexible mind and a willingness to change oneself. Black and Mendenhall (1991) suggest that “willingness to establish relationships with HCNs (host country nationals) would also be expected to shorten the time it takes to reach the adjustment stage (Black and Mendenhall, 1991, p.243).

Similarly, Murphy-Lejeune (2003) developed a model for learning abroad. She argues that learning abroad involves the following:

1. knowledge: factual knowledge, sociocultural realities, study/work-based knowledge, language proficiency and communicative competence
2. strategic skills: autonomy and self-confidence
3. social competence: communicative and social confidence
4. personal and interpersonal attitude

Based on the above researchers' work, a framework is presented next which guided this research. This consists of three dimensions:

The psychological dimension: culture shock and U-curve hypothesis and

Sociocultural dimension: communicative competence, cultural knowledge (cultural distance), sociocultural environment,

Knowledge dimension: language skills, academic issues (influencing students' level of satisfaction and well-being)

These lead to the following leading items:

- a. Culture Shock and U-curve hypothesis
- b. English language (including communicative competence)
- c. Sociocultural adjustment (culture, cultural distance, sociocultural environment)
- d. Academic culture

In this study, the above framework is applied to international postgraduate students' on arrival experience as they are regarded as cross-cultural travellers after their arrival in their target country.

3.5. Summary

In this chapter I have reviewed the theoretical issues in the literature which are related to my empirical study, and have identified concepts of culture, academic culture and adjustment which arose from the empirical review in chapter two. Based on the discussion of other researchers' work (e.g. Brooks, 1964; Tylor, 1871), I have defined the notion of "culture" in my study. Lastly, I have presented a conceptual framework of my research, which served as a skeleton of this thesis.

Chapter 4 Research methodology

4.1. Introduction

In chapters two and three, I discussed the empirical review of international students' experience in English speaking countries, and identified key concepts which arose from the review. The following are key concepts used in this thesis: Culture, cross-cultural adjustment, intercultural communicative competence. As a reminder, the overarching research question of this thesis is

“What is the perspective of East Asian students on their experience of being at Green University?”

To probe this research question and its sub questions (for details see chapter 1), a research methodology was required.

Research methodology is an approach to address a research question. In this chapter firstly I will introduce how I started to do my research, how I shifted my research focus, and what kind of study it became. Secondly, I will explain the basis for my research, and my research approach and design. Arguments for using particular instruments will be presented in the relevant section. The process for analysing both qualitative and quantitative data was explored next. Finally, the researcher's role, which made this research different from other research on studying and living abroad, was investigated.

4.2. Pilot study

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, when I started my research, my first interest was in ICT and language acquisition. However, at that time, my interest was very broad and my ideas were not clear. I spent more than three months reading and comparing second language acquisition theories and wrote reports on this. To help narrow down my research topic, I carried out a pilot study at the beginning of my first year.

As Robson (2002) suggests, a pilot study is a good way to see whether your idea is feasible. Yin (2003) also indicates that a pilot study can help the researcher both to narrow down the research plans and to refine the content of the data and research procedure. Convenience, approachability and geographic proximity are the main principles in carrying out a pilot study (Yin, 2003) and I focussed for my own pilot study on these issues.

My pilot study was undertaken with a sample of 15 international students who were from mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Germany, Poland, Portugal and Malaysia, whose subjects of study were diverse, ranging from the arts, the sciences to the social sciences. All of them were studying at the University of Green, and could use at least two languages. Some of them were my friends while others joined in my pilot study because of their friends' recommendation. Before coming to the UK, all of them had to take English language tests, such as TOESL or IELTS.

I carried out a semi-structured interview with participants, which covered the following aspects:

- 1) How long they had been studying English
- 2) Their confidence in using English
- 3) The four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), assessing which of these were their strongest and weakest skills in English
- 4) Whether they had the intention of improving their English, whether they took any formal courses to do this; formal or informal strategies, which were more helpful to improve English, and, why?
- 5) Whether the environment had any impact on their English since they had come to the UK.

Before I carried out the interviews, I had permission from all the participants to audio tape our conversation. After I listened to the interview tapes, I classified the data around frequently occurring topics in. As I did this manually, I had to go back to my data many times. The interviews were manageable because I interviewed each person only once. I have to admit that the analysis was very rough, but I think I covered all the main topics. My main findings were as followings:

- a. Students who were doing science subjects were more confident about their reading and listening, while they felt speaking was the weakest part in their second language (SL) learning. Almost none of the science students in the pilot study had attended any formal language class to

improve their SL proficiency. On the other hand, arts and social science students worried more about writing than science students, and were more critical about their language skills. Most of them had attended language learning classes and felt that they had benefited greatly.

- b. All the participants agreed that the environment was important for SL (second language) learning. Most of them felt that after they came to the UK, their speaking and listening competence had improved greatly. The only exception was one female participant who always used her first language with her peers. She said the environment did not have any influence on her English study.
- c. Students who were from the European Union and Latin America seemed to benefit more from the English-speaking environment in terms of English language learning than students from the East Asia.
- d. For most students, their English language skills development had stopped before they had achieved native-like competence (fossilization). The reasons varied. It may be that they stopped learning because they did not feel the necessity to achieve more, and they were satisfied with their current level. Self evaluation then seemed a key factor for personal development.

4.2.1. How did I shift my research focus?

My initial interest was in exploring ICT and English language learning and that was the reason that the main focus of my pilot study was students' English language learning. However, this project posed difficulties in that it called for

detailed observation and reporting on the uses students made of ICT. However, my methods were geared to exploring more general issues of students' life experience in the UK. I was challenged by my upgrade panel and I was urged to rethink my research focus, research questions and accordingly, the research methodology. My part time job at the international office and pre-sessional English language course in Green University gave me the opportunity to meet a large number of international students, and to assess their level of contentment and the extent of their fears from both an academic and a daily life angle. I found that there were gaps in the literature and empirical research about this group of international students. In the end, I shifted my research focus to developing greater knowledge and understanding of the life experience of East Asian students in the UK, though English language was still an important component of my research.

4.3. The basis for my research

Once I had a clearer direction, I began to think a little bit more about the basis for my research. Traditionally, there are three research foundations: objectivism, constructivism and subjectivism. Each of these will guide one to a different research perspective.

Objectivism claims that there is an objective reality "out there", so research is about discovering an objective truth. A research tradition which is closely linked to objectivism is positivism, which claims that knowledge can be described objectively. Conversely, constructivism claims that truth and

meaning are created by the subjects' interactions with the world. Meaning is constructed not discovered, so subjects construct their own meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. The research tradition which is closely linked to constructivism is interpretivism, which claims that human beings interpret the world subjectively. In contrast to constructivism, subjectivism claims that meaning does not emerge from the interplay between the subject and the outside world, but is imposed on the object by the subject. Subjects construct meaning from within the collective unconsciousness, for instance, from drama and from religious belief (Gray, 2004).

In my research context, constructivism and interpretivism were my major research basis. The purpose of the research was to understand actions and meanings (Cohen & Manion, 1994, p.39). This is a particularly appropriate stance for my study because I believe that Asian students' life experience, and the way to address it, is a product of social action. Asian students' English language learning problems are in a constant state of revision. Many new problems arise, and there is no direct, one-to-one relationship between Asian students (subject) and their problems (object). Their problems are interpreted through the classification schemas of the mind (Williams & May, 2003).

Both Robson (2002) and Neuman (2000) state that in social science research there are two main trends in research: qualitative and quantitative (Robson

terms them as fixed design and flexible design). Each has its strength and weakness. The main differences are shown in Table 4.1.

Quantitative Style	Qualitative Style
Measure objective facts	Construct social reality, cultural meaning
Focus on variables	Focus on interactive processes, events
Reliability is key	Authenticity is key
Value free	Values are present and explicit
Independent of context	Situationally constrained
Many cases, subjects	Few cases, subjects
Statistical analysis	Thematic analysis
Researcher is detached	Researcher is involved

Table 4.1: Quantitative versus Qualitative

(Cited from Neuman, 2000, p.16)

Robson (2002) also suggests that the research purpose leads to research questions, and research questions guide research methods and sampling strategy. In a similar way, Yin (2003) claims that the type of research question being presented is one factor in deciding which strategies to use. My research aimed to explore the experience of Asian students in the UK, this implied exploration of a natural setting. In doing so I aimed to go into greater depth, and look at a limited number of students, instead of asking a few questions of a large population. As the lived experience of students changes with time, it would be helpful to take a more longitudinal approach (Gray, 2004).

As my research looked at the experience of international Asian students' experience in the UK, trying to identify social reality and cultural meaning, so it

seemed that a qualitative research approach was more suitable in my case. On the other hand, as Neuman (2000) states, a complementary approach using both constructivism and interpretivism methods is acceptable. This combines the strength of both and makes the research stronger. Thus, my study was based on both constructivism and interpretivism. Thus, I decided to use qualitative research as my main research approach, while also using some quantitative research to strengthen the objectivity of my research.

4.4. My research approach

As I discussed in the previous section, my research was mainly qualitative, this meant my design could, for example, be case study or ethnographic study.

Many different definitions of case study have been given. For example, Yin (2003) defines case study as "... an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p.13). Robson (2002) defines case study as "... a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence" (p.5). Adelman et al. (1980) claim that case study allows generalisations either about an instance or from an instance to a class, giving attention to the subtlety and complexity of the case.

These and other definitions share a view that case study is “strong in reality”; and recognises the complexity and ‘embeddedness’ of social truths. Case studies go deep rather than wide though they do allow for generalisations based on the identification of recurring variables and the readability of the study. The best case studies are capable of offering some support to alternative interpretations (Adelman & Kemmis, 1980). Cohen & Manion (2003) also claim that one of the strengths of case study is that it can see the cause and effects in a real life context. A case study tries to catch the “close-up reality and ‘thick description’ of participants” (Cohen & Manion, 2003, p.182). Other researchers (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995 p.322) state that case study is most suitable when the researcher has little control over the real event. After considering the pros and cons of case study, I decided to use a case study approach in my research. The reasons are stated below.

I am conducting research in a real-life context and my case study participants are coming to the UK for their own benefit, not for me or for any other specific organisation. As a researcher I was engaged with their experience, recording aspects of what had happened to them. Everything was taking place in a natural setting. Furthermore, one of the purposes of my research was to investigate why Asian students come to the UK to receive their education (cause). During and after their course, I wanted to see what they had gained from their overseas study and what the influences of this experience were (effect) in real life. Therefore, it seemed that case study was suitable for my research design. I was aware that the research findings from my case study may be hard to generalise, but on the other hand, my study can inform other

researchers or international students, and host universities who are/will be involved in international education. In a sense my research can offer support or interpretation to students who are in a similar situation.

According to researchers (e.g. Yin, 2003; Merriam, 1998), there are different types of case study. Yin (2003), for example, outlines six different types of case studies. Firstly, case study research can be based on single or multiple-case studies; secondly, whether single or multiple, the case study can be exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory (causal). This outline is in line with Robson (2002), who classifies research as having an exploratory, descriptive and explanatory purpose. On the other hand, Merriam (1998) classifies four kinds of case study based on disciplinary orientation: ethnographic, historical, psychological and sociological. Merriam (1998) claims that qualitative research, especially in education, has been influenced by anthropology. If a case study is focusing on a group of students, it would be categorised as an ethnographic case study. As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) maintain “if it teaches readers how to behave appropriately in the cultural setting,.... (p.38)” then it would be regarded as successful ethnography. Agreeing with this, Robson (2002) states that the character of ethnography is to focus on “description and interpretation of the culture and social structure of a social group” (p.178). He observes that though ethnographic study is distinctive, it still can link with a case study approach. My case study borrowed some ideas from ethnography, as I focused on a specific group of people, and the purpose of my research is to inform East Asian students who are going to study in the UK (Merriam, 1998).

My case study is exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. It is exploratory because I start with questions rather than hypotheses for testing. It is descriptive because I will present a detailed description of East Asian students' academic adjustment at Green University. It is also explanatory because I will explain data bearing on cause-effect relationships and draw conclusions.

A longitudinal study would be an advantage to my research. Through long term longitudinal research, the researcher can capture the thinking and meaning of people in the social group from variables such as feeling, behaviour and emotion (Robson, 2002). It is hard to say what length of time needs to be taken on the case study, but Saldaña (2003) suggests that a minimum of 9 months is necessary.

4.5. My case study context (selecting the case)

Many agree (e.g. Merriam, 1998; Cohen & Manion, 2003; Neuman, 2000) that probability and non-probability sampling are two basic sampling strategies. As probability sampling is mainly used for survey questionnaires for the purpose of generalising, which is not the purpose of case study, non-probability sampling is more appropriate for this case study research.

According to Cohen & Manion (2003), there are many forms of non-probability samples, such as convenience sampling; quota sampling; purposive sampling; dimensional sampling; or snowball sampling. Neuman (2000) suggests further categories. These are: haphazard sample; quota sample; purposive sample;

snowball sample; deviant case sample; sequential sample or theoretical sample. Among these various forms of non-probability samples, the most common form is purposive or purposeful sampling (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) claims that purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that researchers can find, understand and have an in-depth view from the sample they have taken.

My research targets are East Asian postgraduate students who have newly arrived in England to pursue their higher education. Therefore, students from a pre-sessional English course would be suitable for my research. The pre-sessional English course is an intensive English programme for non-native speakers of English. Its purpose is to help them to acquire the necessary language skills to attend their intended postgraduate academic courses at the start of the university session. Every year, over half of the students attending the pre-sessional courses are from Asian countries. Some of the students attended the pre-sessional course because they held a conditional offer in which attendance at the pre-sessional class was one of the conditions; others volunteer to join the course for their own reasons, such as enjoying the “beautiful” English summer; polishing spoken and listening English; and making more international friends.

My research design was to be longitudinal, so this group of students seemed suitable for me because I could trace them for 15 months. However, as I mentioned earlier, some of the participants in my research had previously

achieved high scores in their English tests, and had volunteered to attend the course.

The 40 students who were surveyed were the entire population of East Asian students who attended both phases of the pre-sessional programmes (NB: there were two phases in the pre-sessional course 2004/5 at Green University). This was a sample of those who attended the whole pre-sessional programme, as another 150 students attended the second part only; and, of course, they were a relatively small proportion of East Asian students at Green University, given that over 1,000 international students did not attend the pre-sessional course at all in the year 2004/5.

4.6. Researcher's role

As a researcher, I acted as an insider in the case. One description of case study is "...spotlight on one instance, in-depth study, focus on relationships and process, natural setting, multiple sources and multiple methods" (Denscombe, 1998, p.30); a thick description of people's feelings and actions was desirable for my research. One of the advantages for me in doing this research was that I am a verbal person so I enjoyed talking with friends. After two and half months' initial contact, a level of what seemed to be trust was built between me and the pre-sessional English course students. At times, I felt that they regarded me as their mentor and with some I felt we had become good friends. As I did my Master's course at the same university as them, and worked in different departments in the University for paid part time jobs, many students approached me to get advice in finding part time jobs, or carrying out

their library projects. Some of the young graduates were homesick, or had love affair troubles. No matter what their questions were, I always lent them a listening ear, as Yin (2003) suggests that good listening skills are essential for a case study investigator. Most of the students were glad to talk with me as they found I was trustworthy, helpful and reliable.

I shared the same university accommodation with my participants and had opportunities to meet them in the university supermarket, library, campus, parties and so on. At times, when we met, we just had a quick chat; the topic could be about their lives, studies, or other friends we mutually knew. At other times, we just bumped into each other and said “hello” and then separated. But from friends who were accompanying them, from their appearance and facial expressions I could tell whether things were going well on their side. I know my impression could be biased so I always tried to talk with other students who knew them, or find other sources to negate or support my idea. In the year, I organised or co-organised a Christmas party, an Easter Party and a farewell drink with this group of students. The parties were good opportunities for me to meet my participants and to update information. On the other hand, students came to the parties and exchanged information, helping each other. As I described before, the university is located far from the city centre, and appears to students as in the middle of nowhere! Therefore, it was popular if the organised activities were within or near the campus.

Indeed, parties are always popular if they are cheap (or free!) and interesting. When I administered my questionnaires to my participants, most of them tried to reply quickly as they knew me and trusted me. In the year, I also received telephone calls or emails from these students asking for help such as writing PhD application forms, looking for accommodation, emotional support. I always made every effort to help them. It has been two years since I finished my field work; yet I keep in touch with most of the participants as we have remained friends since my research. The rapport between my participants and me was a great help to smoother research.

4.7. My research methods (data collection methods and tools)

This research used a variety of data gathering tools. They were: interviews, questionnaires, research diaries and participant observation.

4.7.1. Questionnaire Survey

Questionnaires are among the most popular data collecting tools in research (Gray, 2004, p.188). As Gillham (2000) claims, questionnaires have many advantages. For example, they are comparatively quick to administer, lack interview bias, and may be cost effective. Cohen & Manion (2003) add that questionnaires have the strength of being comparatively easy to analyse because the close-ended questions can be coded quickly. Gray (2004) states that questionnaires have the advantage of obtaining responses from many people in a short time. In addition, respondents can answer the questionnaire at a convenient time and place so time and distance will not be a barrier. On

the other hand, as with any other research tool, a questionnaire has its shortcomings. Gray (2004) states that the response rate to a questionnaire can be low; respondents may not have the chance to clarify unclear questions, so the answers could be inaccurate.

As a questionnaire survey can give a detailed and quantified description from a larger population, and can enhance the quality of my research, I decided to use a survey questionnaire to get a general description of my target group. My initial plan was to triangulate survey results with other qualitative research results.

My design for the questionnaire was influenced by Cohen & Manion (2003) who propose that the process of designing a questionnaire is turning a general purpose into a concrete researchable one. The purpose of using a survey questionnaire was to triangulate with my other qualitative data and help answer my research questions.

The questionnaire response rate

The questionnaires were delivered either in person or by email attachment for the purpose of students' convenience. Students could choose their preferred method to answer the questionnaire. In the first round questionnaire, I received a good response rate: 35 out of 40 students returned the questionnaires. In the second round, 33 out of 40 students gave their replies. However, in the last round questionnaire, the response rate was quite low; only 24 out of the 40 students completed the survey (see Table 4.2).

Questionnaires	Date	Response Rate
First round questionnaire	November 2004	87.5%
Second round questionnaire	March 2005	80%
Third round questionnaire	August 2005	60%

Table 4.2: Details of questionnaires with participants

The response rate in the first and second rounds was high because before I started my data collection with my participants, I was, as explained earlier, a mentor for this group of students while they were doing their pre-sessional English course. When I started my data collection, my participants responded positively. Also, they knew that the survey was important for my research, so most of them tried to reply as soon as they could. After two weeks of sending out the questionnaires, I sent reminder emails to everyone, and telephone calls to the participants who did not reply to me promptly.

The final questionnaire response rate was much lower than the first and second round questionnaire. This was partly because most of the students were worried about their future at this time and preoccupied by other things. It was less comfortable for them to sit down and fill in a questionnaire. Meanwhile, many of the students had moved out of university and started their part-time jobs or job hunting activities so it became more difficult to get in touch with them. (NB: Later I was able to talk to non-respondents and could trace the reasons for not replying.) This may mean that the last survey was not as representative as the previous two. But looking at the returns from the third survey, and comparing the results with the first and second survey, I found a consistent pattern and felt that the third survey was still representative.

Questionnaire design and administration

The questionnaire contained 18 main questions with 12 subquestions, giving a total of 26. The form of the questions was mixed: both open ended questions and closed questions were involved. The closed questions were of different types, such as yes/no questions, category questions, ranking questions, scale questions, sequencing questions and multiple choice questions. Before sending the questionnaires out, I carried out a pilot questionnaire with a small group who had similar learning experience to my target group but who were not within my research group. After I got the replies from my pilot group, I modified the draft and sent the final version out to my target group by email attachment.

I sent my questionnaires to people through emails in the first instance. Then I identified people who preferred the traditional paper-and-pen method so I took my questionnaires to see them at a convenient time for them. I clarified the possibly unclear parts in my questionnaire (such as the meaning of “ICT”) when I sent my emails. Also when I met my participants on campus I asked them whether they were clear about my questions. In this way, I cleared up any ambiguity with my respondents. Thus, one of the disadvantages of questionnaire: the possibility that sample members may simply not understand the questions, was not applicable in my research. As Robson (2002) observes, response rate is a key concern in survey research. I addressed this by sending reminder emails, making telephone calls, and seeing people in person.

4.7.2. Quantitative Data

The questionnaires were distributed at three stages in an academic year: in November, March and July to the same students. The first two rounds of questionnaires covered the themes such as language learning, learning strategies, settling down, pre-departure preparation, self-evaluation, ICT and learning. During the different rounds of data collection, I added some further questions which were appropriate at that time. For example, in the first round there were biographical questions and questions about pre-departure preparations; the second round covered their level of satisfaction with assignments or examinations; the last round asked the students to look back in order to establish a retrospective overall view of their stay in the UK in the past year.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, as time went on my research focus shifted from international students' ICT use and language learning to their academic adjustment. So in the third round questionnaire I asked about the issues related to academic adjustment, such as their satisfaction with life, and their future plans. I am aware that it would have been better to have asked students questions about life satisfaction from the beginning of my surveys. Retrospectively, one can realise that this factor is a weakness of this survey, though some of this information had been extracted from interview data.

The data was collated and entered onto SPSS using a data editor. In this way, a descriptive report was generated. Results have been presented wherever

possible in percentages, for clarity. Some of the questions (mainly questions about ICT and language learning) have been asked in every survey, therefore data from these questions have been displayed over time to make a comparison.

As an example (Figure 4.1), I compared responses to perspectives on language development. As discussed further in chapter five, this shows:

- a. Most of the students were satisfied with their listening English improvement.
- b. The level of satisfaction with English reading was increasing over time.
- c. Students were most satisfied with their written English improvement in the second term.
- d. Less than half of the students were satisfied with their spoken English improvement over time.

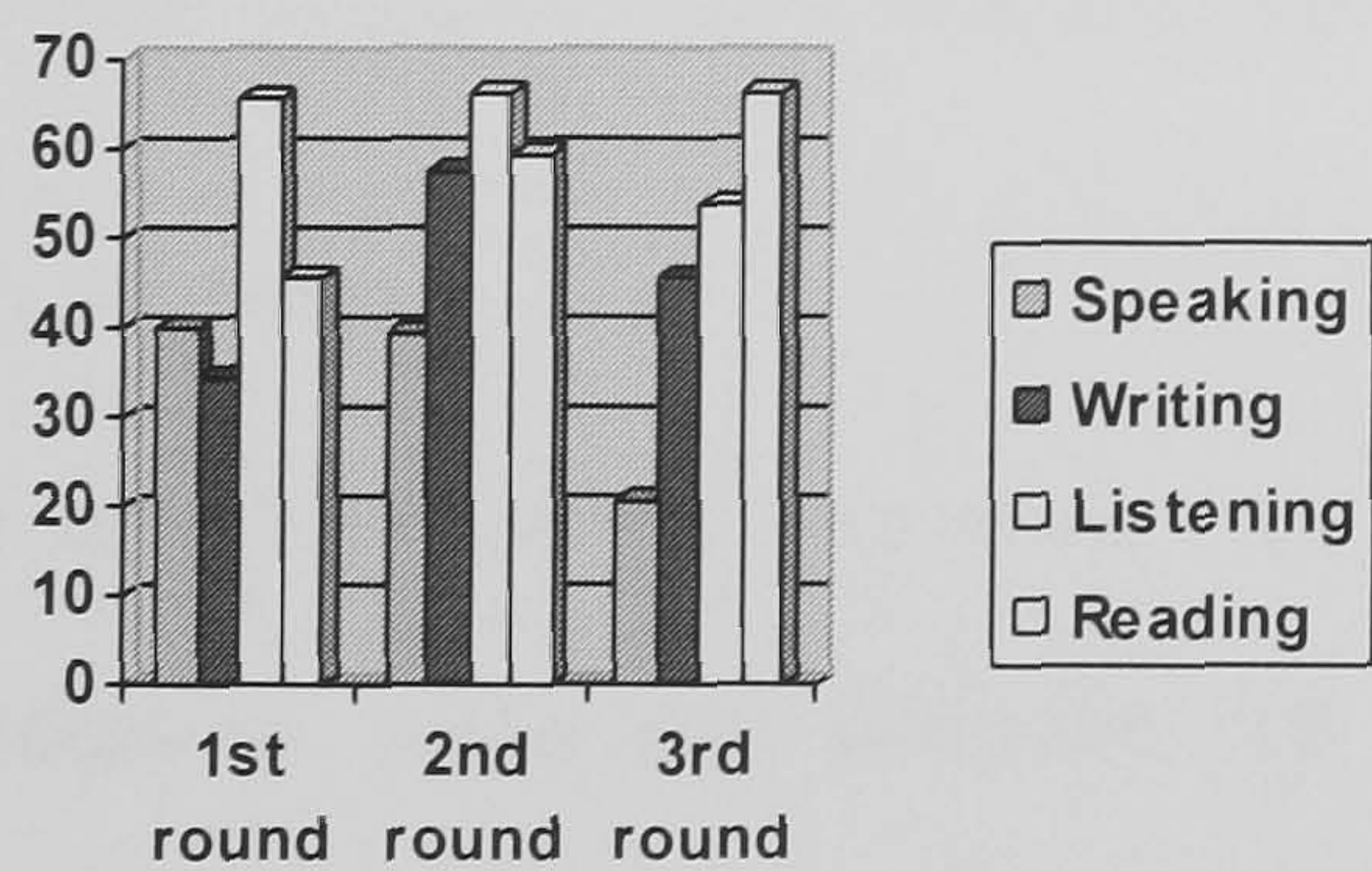


Figure 4.1: Students’ satisfaction with their 4 skills improvement

My main concern in displaying the data was to identify longitudinal changes, though I also looked at the relationship between participants’ demographic

background (such as gender, nationality, age) and other questions. For example, in the case of gender I looked at whether males or females were more satisfied with their life in the UK. In the case of nationality, I looked at whether students from certain countries had more language problems. In the case of academic subjects I was trying to establish whether students studying a particular subject were more or less concerned about their English language skills (see chapter 9, “external factors: academic subject” for conclusion). By looking at the data I displayed, I drew conclusions (see chapter 8 and chapter 9 for further details).

I reported my data descriptively rather than statistically. The reasons for this were, firstly, that the findings did not lend themselves to statistical analysis, and secondly because the nature and aim of this research were descriptive. Another reason was that I had shifted my research focus in the middle of my data collection, so the survey could not address all the research questions. My research questions led me to go “deep rather than wide”, but going deep is not one of the strengths that are provided by conducting a survey.

4.7.3. Interviews

As I described above, my case study is both exploratory and descriptive. Participants' views and attitudes are essential for my research. Therefore interview was a good tool for me to obtain in-depth data (Cohen & Manion, 2003). Merriam (1998) also states that the interview is a common tool to collect qualitative data. Furthermore, interviews could allow me to explore and deepen my research questions by listening to inside voices, to have a “thick description” account. The practical context was that I had already had

the oral permission of my participants, and we had built up a positive relationship. Most of them showed interest in, and enthusiasm about, my research, and were happy to see me in the future. Furthermore, all of them would stay in the university for at least one year, and they were living not far from my accommodation. Transport and accessibility did not turn out to be a problem at the first stage which gave me confidence to use interviews in my research.

Also, as a researcher, I had developed interview skills after the pilot study, such as not asking multiple questions, leading questions or yes-or-no questions in the interview (Merriam, 1998). Besides the attempt to ask “good” questions, I also learnt to pay attention to some “trivial” but actually important issues such as finding a comfortable and quiet place for the interview; always preparing enough back up batteries for the recorder; and keeping field notes.

As part of the research, because I was conducting interviews with people from a different cultural background from myself, I was advised to be sensitive about the following issues (Gray, 2004)

- a) to be aware of the interviewee’s cultural background so the messages would not be misunderstood
- b) to be aware of participants’ basic language terms, gestures and interaction styles
- c) to build up a rapport through community activities and groups

As Brewer argues, “One of the advantages of doing interview is ‘interviews are well suited to enabling researchers to gain access to the ‘meaning-

endowing capacities (of the interviewee) and produce rich, deep data” (Brewer, 2000, p.66). It is true that any level of language difficulties may cause problems both for the interviewer in understanding responses and for the interviewee in understanding questions. The advantage for me, as an Eastern researcher, was my awareness of Asian culture, and using the “high-context culture” approach in communication. My close relationship with my participants was an advantage for me in crossing barriers.

Nevertheless, though my participants and myself were all from Asia, we still had differences varying from region to region. In my research, around 70 percent of the students had a different cultural background from myself. For example, Japanese people are said to be concerned about politeness so they rarely say “no”. Instead, they might express their disagreement in expressions such as ‘yes, ... but...’ or ‘it is difficult...’. The avoidance of saying “No” confuses Westerners (Takanashi, 2004). However, other Asian people, such as Chinese or Korean do not have this kind of characteristic in communication. Also, as English was not the first language for all the participants, and they were in the process of improving, sometimes they used “broken English” or special body language to express their meaning, so I was aware of this. For example, at one time when I was interviewing Janet, she said “I bussed Green Uni”. I could not understand. I asked her whether she took a bus from the city centre to Green University, and she said “yes”. In this way I was sure that I did not misunderstand her.

Based on the analysis of the first round questionnaire and my research topic, I designed my first round interview questions. Interviews were set at a mutually convenient time, and reminders, such as emails and phone calls were sent one or two days before the interview date. Because I was aware of the direction of my research topic, but wanted to explore what had happened to my research targets, a semi-structured interview was used (e.g. Cohen & Manion, 2003; Gray 2004). This approach enabled me to collect more vivid and detailed data but still have a structure to guide me in the process and make comparisons between interviewees. During the interviews, I used both a digital voice recorder and traditional tape recorder as a back-up since I was new to the digital format. For example, on one occasion I had a technical problem so I could not transcribe the data from the digital recorder to my computer; another time my tape recorder was running out of battery so I had to rely on my digital recorder. After each interview, I stored the voice document in my computer, and then did back up on an online hard disk site. Meanwhile, I stored all my interview tapes in a safe place as a last resort. Table 4.3 presents a summary of the interview schedules.

I chose the qualitative software NVIVO to analyse my interview data. It was difficult at the beginning to learn this software, but in the end I found it useful.

Interviews	Time	Interview time	Respondents
First round interview	December 2004	45 to 70 minutes	8
Second round	May – June 2005	60-70 minutes	8
Third round	August-Sep 2005	70-90 minutes	6

Table 4.3: Details of interviews with respondents

The second round interview was more straightforward as I was more experienced. Nevertheless, my third round interview was frustrating for me because two of my respondents did not turn up at the appointed time. I used many ways to get in touch with them, but, for various reasons, I never had the chance to carry out the last interview with them. I was, however, able to form a picture of them through observation and a research diary, or interviewing their friends.

Among my interview participants, I could have communicated with students from mainland China and Taiwan using their first language, Mandarin Chinese. In order to keep the consistency and style of my interview, I decided to use English as our interview language. I also used English in other communications (e.g. phone calls) with students from mainland China and Taiwan for the consistency of my “language policy”. The advantage of using English in interview was I did not need to translate the data again after my transcription. The disadvantage was that students might not be able to express their meanings freely in English. Nevertheless, many students expressed their appreciation of using English in the interview as they regarded it as a good opportunity to practise their spoken English.

4.7.4. Research Diary

As mentioned before, when I supported pre-sessional students during the summer vacation, 2004, I had the opportunity to stay with them in the same building for two and a half months. I had opportunities to attend various social events with them throughout the summer. I was aware of their listening and

speaking English development during that period of time. Some of them had problems in writing assignments in English so they asked help from me; sometimes I helped them read important documents, so I was aware of their English reading abilities. In all of the above mentioned interactions, I had the opportunity to gather 'live' data from a 'live' situation, and could see things that might be unconsciously missed (Cohen & Manion, 2003, p.305). During the pre-sessional period, almost every day I wrote down what I had seen and thought in Chinese. Writing a diary in Chinese has been my hobby since I was a teenager. Every time before and after I sent my questionnaires out, I wrote my diary to describe what had happened; what frustrations I had met; what interesting things I had found and so on (in English). If I read some helpful thesis or book, I would keep my thinking in my diary as well (in English). Contentment and worries during the year of my field work were also put in my diary. I carried on updating my research diary even after my field work had finished, because I still kept in touch with most of my interview participants.

The diary was organised chronologically, with part of the research diary mixed with my personal diary in Chinese. Looking back at my diary I was able to identify repeated concerns and pick out instances or incidents to exemplify interview or survey findings. My personal diary and research diary are vital complements to my interview data because they helped me track people within my study. As I mentioned in Chapters 2, 3 and 7, all my research participants were from relatively high context cultural backgrounds. Sometimes what they said could not be taken as a straightforward account. In such circumstances, the ability to understand the "subtext" is essential to see the phenomenon in depth. For example, the following research diary extract

explains why Shirley, one of my case study participants, declined to take part in my last round interview. I was upset with that for a long time, because she had been very enthusiastic and cooperative with my research at the beginning. Three months later she wrote me an email explaining that she did not want to see me at the last stage of her study because her grandmother was ill. She said she was busy at that time so she did not want to see anybody. I recorded her email and my reaction in my diary which was a great help for my data analysis.

Example 1

Research Diary (04/01/06)

I am back to my normal life today though I am still excited about my trip back in China. I know that I have to work harder after 3 weeks holiday... My New Year resolution is (omitted)....

One good piece of news at the beginning of this year is I received an email from Shirley! Shirley was very cooperative and enthusiastic with my research at the beginning. However, maybe because of love worries or other personal reasons, she went home suddenly without informing any of her friends. I sent her many emails but she didn't reply. Before Christmas I sent a lot of greetings to my friends, including my case study participants. I emailed Shirley with the email address she gave me before, however my email was returned. Then I tried again with another email address I got from her friend. After many days she replied to me. In this email, she told me her current situation, such as where she is working and how her life is. Also she explained the reasons that she didn't take part in my last round interview. She said that

“Yeah, I'm hurry to go back to Thailand and I rarely talk to you during Sep because I had a serious problem about my family (the last grandmother that I have was ill). At first, I didn't wanna go back because i already paid for the rent and everything so that why I was busy at that time. Hope you're not angry me.”

I am so glad to read her email and know her current situation. What a relief! I was wondering why she left us without telling any of her friends for a long time. Here is the answer!

4.8. Validity and reliability

Validity is vital to effective research, because a piece of research would be questionable if it is not valid (Cohen & Manion, 2003). However, there is no research which can be claimed to be 100 percent valid. As Cohen & Manion (2003, p.105) claim, “validity, then, should be seen as a matter of degree rather than as an absolute state”. There are many different kinds of validity, and it is impossible to explore all of them in one project. In this research, I am focusing on internal validity, external validity and content validity. These are discussed below.

Internal validity: *to demonstrate whether a piece of research is using the right tools and right format to address the right question.*

My reflection: I have done this by thinking about my research tools, the frame of the tools, and how they fit my research purpose.

External validity: *the degree to which the results can be generalized to the wider population, cases or situations, also to comparing the results to other studies.*

My reflection: One way I have done this is to think about my findings in relation to what other researchers have said about the similar topics in their studies, see my discussion chapter (chapter 9) for detail.

Content validity: *to show that the instrument fairly and comprehensively covers the domain or items that it purports to cover.*

My reflection: I will discuss this in terms of triangulation (p.89).

(The definitions are adapted from Cohen & Manion, 2003, p.109)

The criteria for reliability differ between quantitative research and qualitative research. In quantitative research, reliability is more about dealing with “the consistency and explicability over time, over instrument and over groups of respondents” (Cohen & Manion, 2003, p.117). Stability, equivalence and internal consistency are the three principal types of reliability. On the other hand, in qualitative research, reliability includes “*fidelity to real life, context and situation specificity, authenticity, comprehensiveness, detail, honesty, depth of response and meaningfulness to the respondents*” (Cohen & Manion, 2003, p.120).

Researchers argue about a case study’s reliability and objectivity (Yin, 1994), and claim that case study data is difficult to generalise. Yin (1994) also suggests ways one could address the problem “...if two or more cases are

shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed” (p.31). Gray (2004) claims that to stay longer on the case and to observe or experience the full range of routines can help typify the case. Merriam (1998) argues that six strategies, which are triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory or collaborative modes of research and researcher’s biases can be used to enhance the internal validity of a study. As Cohen & Manion (2003) state, “triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity” (p.112). In this study, I am using multiple sources of evidence, which include interviews, surveys, research diary and observations, to support the credibility and validity. I will nevertheless discuss this topic again in the following “Triangulation and Nested Strategy” section.

4.9. Triangulation and Nested Strategy

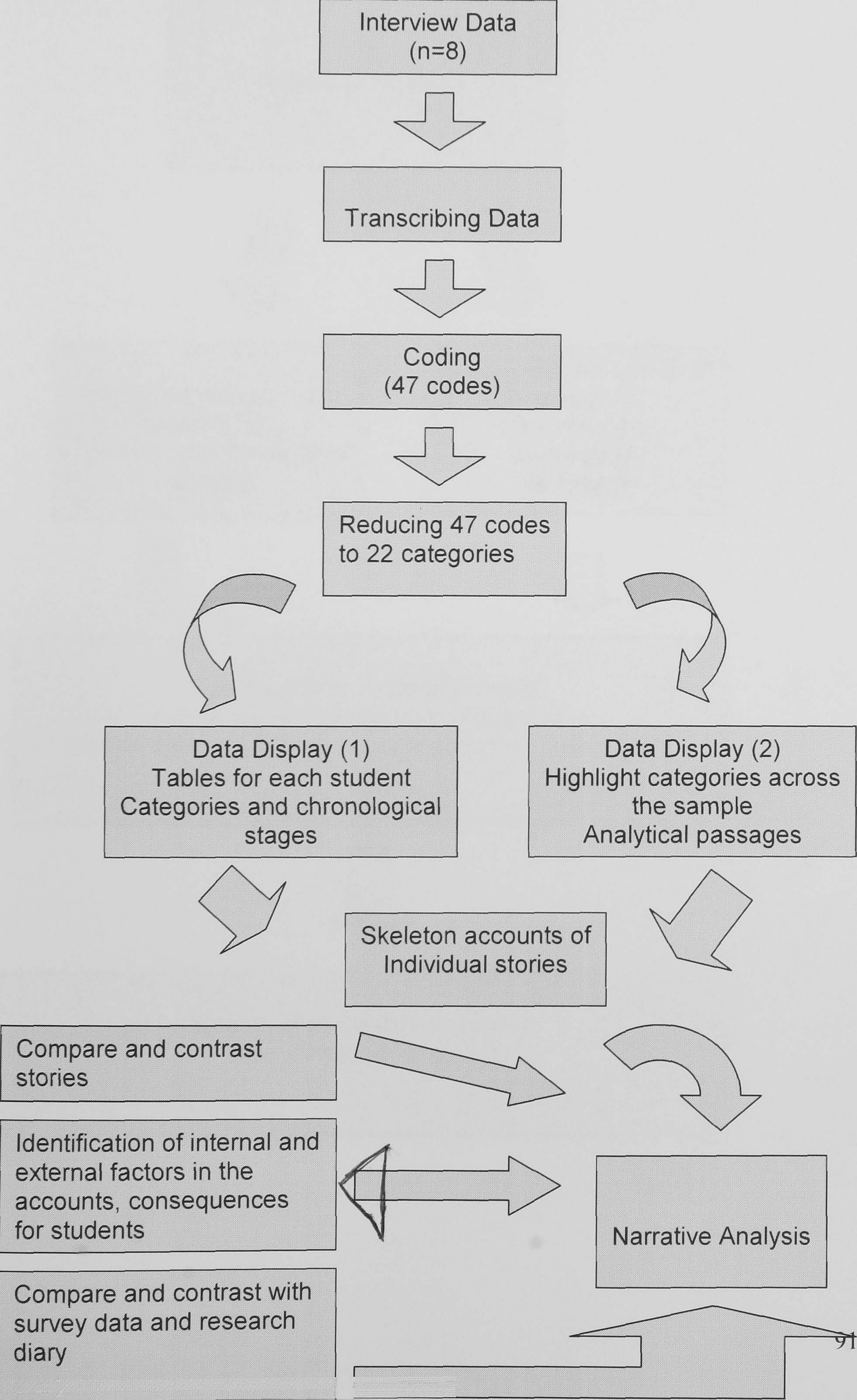
Triangulation is “the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour” (Cohen & Manion, 2003, p.112). Relying on only one method may cause bias or distortion, so the research lacks reliability and validity. On the other hand, the more methods support each other, the greater the research’s reliability (Cohen & Manion, 2003). At the beginning of my research design, I wanted to triangulate my survey and interview findings with my research diaries and participant observations. Furthermore, I intended to compare the knowledge I gained from my participant observation and research diary with my survey and interview data to see whether they were compatible. In broad terms, consistency provides greater credibility. But I am also aware that if different sources of data show major differences, it does not mean my research is invalid. In other words, it

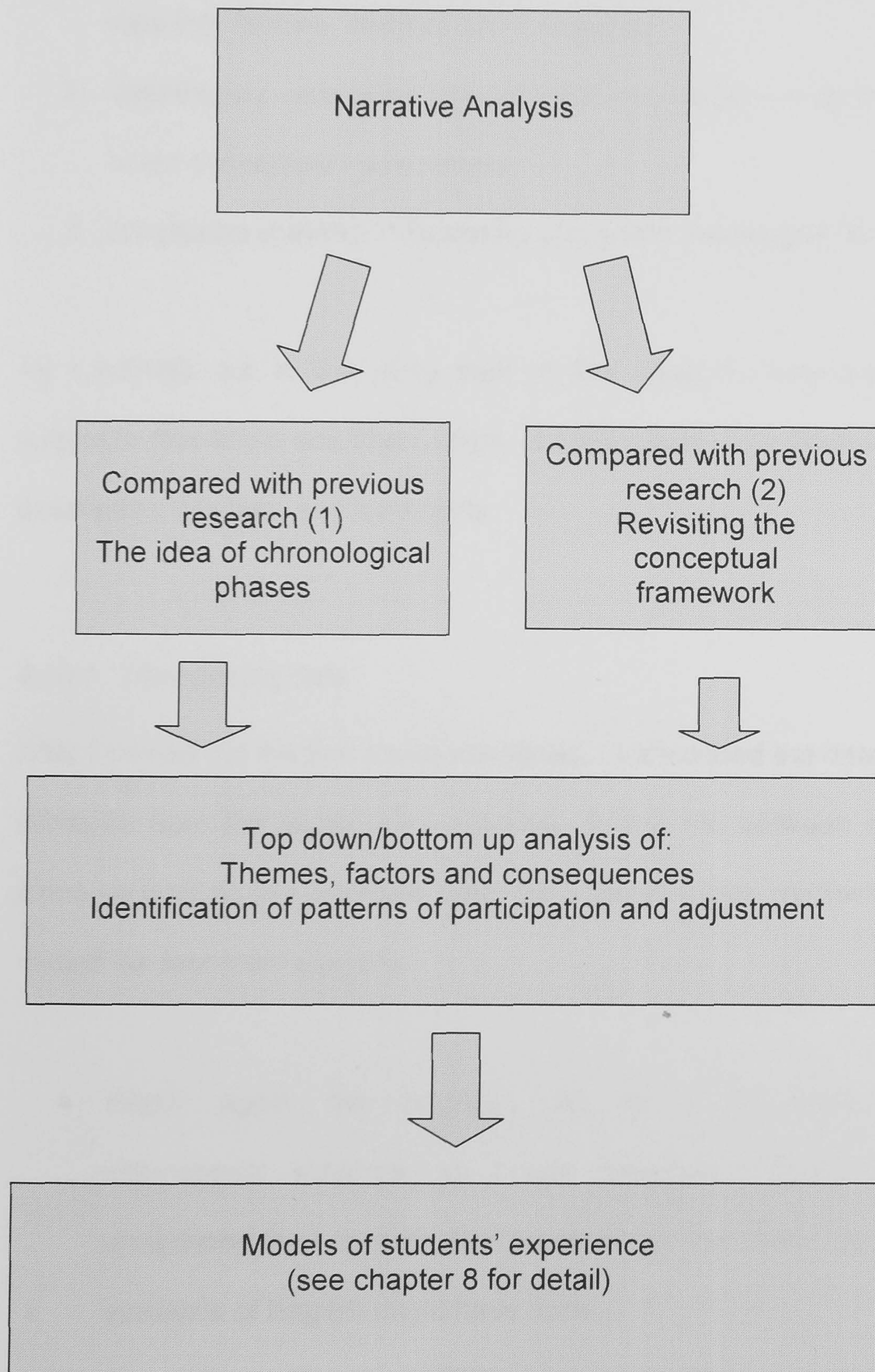
does not make my research better if all the research data consistently tell the same thing. Different data sources give different pictures of real life from different angles.

With the shift of my research focus (as I stated on the first section under the title of *"How did I shift my research focus?"*, p.63 in this chapter), the first two rounds of survey data could be used only partly in my final data analysis, and I had to rely mainly on my qualitative data. In other words, qualitative methods became the predominant methods that guided my project, while quantitative method was only embedded, or nested within the qualitative method (Creswell, 2003). Instead of gaining the advantages of triangulation that I mentioned earlier (the more methods support each other, the greater the research's reliability), this nested strategy helped me to gain broader perspectives, and did provide my study "with the advantages of both quantitative and qualitative data", and "perspectives from the different types of data or from different levels within the study" (Creswell, 2003, p.218). With qualitative data, I was able to triangulate my interview data with my research diary and participant observation data. For example, as I mentioned before, in the last stage of my field work two of my interview participants became unavailable so I had to turn to other sources of data. I found out that one participant was not successful in her assessment so she wanted to avoid talking about this. The other participant's grandmother was ill; meanwhile she split with her lover, so she was depressed and did not want to see anybody. I would not have known this without data from other sources.

4.10. Data analysis (qualitative data)

The diagrams overleaf give an overview of the process of data analysis emerging from the interviews.





Researchers (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998) have suggested that qualitative data analysis can be divided into three stages:

1. data reduction: selecting, collating, summarizing, coding and sorting data into themes, clusters and categories
2. data display: displaying data into pictorial, diagrammatic or visual forms to aid conceptual interpretation
3. conclusion drawing: interpreting and giving meaning to data

As I pointed out in the early part of this chapter, Creswell (1998) also suggests that there are three steps of case study data analysis, which are description, themes, and assertions.

4.10.1. Transcribing data

After I carried out the first round interviews, I transcribed the data sentence by sentence from the digital voice recorder. It took me between seven to nine times as long as the interview time, but I found it was worthwhile to do this myself, for four main reasons:

- *Firstly*, again, the language. As all of the interviewees were international students, as I am, therefore I found that I could understand their conversation much better than those who were native speakers of English might have done.
- *Secondly*, as Merriam (1998) points out, to hire someone to transcribe the tape would lose opportunities to get familiar with the data.

- *Thirdly*, a transcriber would not be able to understand gaps when the tapes were of poor quality.
- *Fourthly*, obviously, to hire someone to transcribe could be expensive!

Patton (1990) suggests that to have a full transcription of the interview is the ideal objective. Similarly, Merriam (1998) indicates that alternatives to fully transcribing should be used only late in a study. I agree with the need for full transcription because putting data on paper helped me understand more. After transcribing each interview, I sent it to my interviewees to ask them whether they were happy with my transcribing, whether it honestly represented what they meant, and whether they were still happy to allow me to use those data in my research. The responses were positive.

As many researchers suggest (e.g. Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 1998), it is better not to leave the data analysis until the last stage. It is better to analyse while you are still collecting. Also my supervisor urged me to transcribe them and make an early stage data analysis. In my case, these suggestions proved to be very helpful. Starting transcribing and analysing data at an early stage helped me strengthen my ideas; also it gave me the chance to fill in parts I did not cover well in the first interviews. As my mind was fresh, it was straightforward to recall the interview situations, and make field notes. I cannot imagine how I could have transcribed all the data at the final stage, and made relevant field notes. Listening to interviews also gave me opportunities to find out shortcomings of my questioning techniques. After consulting my supervisor, other experienced colleagues and research

methodology books, I improved my interview skills in the second and third round interviews.

The first round interview data seemed huge. My supervisor advised me to use qualitative computer software to deal with the data. I was hesitant at the beginning because the software looked complicated. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that it is better if we know what kind of computer users we are, and what kind of database and project we are going to need. My level of computer skill was intermediate, which means I was able to learn new software if I spent enough time on it. My concern at that time was whether it was worthwhile to spend a large amount of time to learn the software by myself. At that time my university's IT service was introducing NVIVO, and was running courses to train research students and staff. I attended the introductory session, and found that the software was not as difficult as I imagined initially. NVIVO helped me store my data under different themes, and helped me display them. It also helped me display rigorously all the data I had under each theme. After all my transcripts in Microsoft Word were ready, as required by NVIVO, I changed all of my data into rich text format, and moved all the tables and embedded objects. Then I imported my pure words RTF format documents into a project I created in NVIVO.

4.10.2. Coding data

Taylor and Bogdan (1984) described a step by step data coding process which is helpful for me to describe my data analysis here. The following explains the coding procedures.

Developing coding categories

By following the structured interview format, interviewers ask the same questions of the same group of people, so it is reasonable to aggregate the answers under the theme of each question. My interviews were semi-structured and it was more appropriate for me to use a more “bottom-up” approach. My supervisors suggested that I should go through the entire first round interview transcripts and mark off units that dealt with the same topic, and then label them as topics and subtopics (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Therefore, I looked at my raw data thoroughly, reading them closely in order to familiarise myself with them. Then I tried to bring out the distinctive parts of the text and its content, underlined them and added explanatory notes. After that I used the underlined data as examples, and compared one example with other examples. Later I created codes and compared and moderated codes in collaboration with my supervisors. Following this method, I created 47 codes initially (see Appendix 2). The next two examples illustrate how I analysed the interview data.

Example 2

“.... Can you tell me how you settled down at Green?

*....Actually I think it's a very hard experience after I reached in UK and study at University of Green. **Firstly I think the English is the biggest barrier for me. Especially for my academic study. Because I major in Chemistry. I met a lot of new vocabulary related to this field. So I found it's very hard to me to study. Especially to get the meaning of theories.** (from Max first round interview)”*

In the above *italic* parts, one can see that the student was talking about his first experience when he arrived in Green University. Therefore, I labelled it “settling down”. To look at this paragraph in more detail, I then underlined some of the *italic* part, and labelled it “subject/specific issues”. I then labelled the italic and bold part as “problems”.

Example 3

“.... Can you tell me how you found your way at Green?

“....actually my language is Thai, you know, so it is quite difficult for me (to settle down), you know, about my speaking in English. But I took a pre-sessional course. At that course I think my English developed quite well.now I am surrounding with an English environment, so I think I am enjoying the English class” (from Shirley first round interview).

In the above example I found the *italic* part was about how this student found her life in Green when she first arrived (according to the context), so I labelled it “settling down”. Then I looked at this part again, and found the shaded part was also about the pre-sessional English course, so I labelled it “pre-sessional course”, and she spoke about the environment, she was contrasting language study with using languages (code “contrast between language study and using language”).

As I displayed in examples 1 and 2, I created many initial labels. Then I used the “raw” labels as examples, and compared similar examples to refine codes.

For example, I compared “subject/specific issues” in example 1 with “pre-sessional course” in example 2, and developed a new code: “orientation”.

Merriam (1998) suggests that the name of categories can come from the researcher, from the participants or other sources such as the literature review. In the case of my research, I named the categories myself, after reviewing some literature. Merriam (1998) warns readers that there are dangers in using borrowed classifications as this may prevent the emergence of new categories. When I was creating/naming my categories, I also followed Dey’s (1993) suggestion that categories should be both conceptually related and empirically rooted. That is, categories must both fit the data and relate to other categories. The five elements of a good thematic code which are advised by Boyatzis (1998, p.31) also inspired my work because I used the categories in the NVIVO software. The five elements are:

- 1) a label (e.g. a name)
- 2) a definition of what the theme concerns (i.e. the characteristic or issue constituting the theme)
- 3) a description of how to know when the theme occurs (i.e. indicators on how to ‘flag’ the theme)
- 4) a description of any qualifications or exclusions to the identifications of the theme
- 5) examples, both positive and negative, to eliminate possible confusion when looking for the theme

As an additional level of scrutiny, my supervisors helped me check whether my categories were appropriate.

The initial 47 codes were unwieldy and I then further compared, moderated and refined, and reduced them to 22 codes (see appendix 2). Based on the initial 15 codes that I created from the first round interview, another seven codes were created when I analysed the second and third round interviews. After that I found that I had reached saturation because when I looked at the raw data there were no more new codes arising from it. Then I assigned a number to each of the 22 coding categories. These 22 codes formed my free codes in the NVIVO software.

However after doing this work, and examining the text, I found that I was creating a lot of descriptive notes about each issue. I was finding it very difficult to relate them to any conceptual framework because the free nodes were not very helpful in clarifying the relationship between codes.

In spite of Gibbs's (2002) assertion that "In terms of how they relate to the text they code, their definitions and so on, there is no real difference between free nodes and tree nodes" (p.73), compared with free nodes, the tree nodes have the following five advantages:

- 1. they keep things tidy*
- 2. they constitute an analysis of the data in themselves. In the process of categorizing responses one develops an understanding of respondents' view of the world*

3. *they can be used to gain an overall view of the way your conceptual framework is growing....By collapsing branches of the tree low down you can hide some of the detail and thus get a view of the framework as a whole. Examining the tree also shows how the conceptual framework could be modified or improved*
4. *they prevent the duplication of nodes*
5. *they form the basis for further investigation.*

(Adapted from Gibbs, 2002, p.73)

After establishing the advantage of tree nodes, even though I knew it would be time consuming, I made a radical step by reworking the coding around the system. I did this using five major codes, and a certain number of sub codes. I found my data could be more clearly displayed by using a tree or hierarchy of nodes. After I finished my conceptual framework, I used the following five themes as tree nodes (top level nodes): language skills, academic culture, sociocultural environment, new learning strategy, faculty-student relationship, and then I imported the 22 free nodes as children nodes (nodes belong to the same tree nodes).

In retrospect, I wish I had realised the function of tree nodes and created them much earlier. Nevertheless, the whole experience has been very useful to me by compelling me to examine the fine details of the data. I am glad that I have created tree nodes because after examining them I had a clearer view of my conceptual framework. Based on the tree nodes I modified my conceptual framework. To make it clear, I started with five themes (the five top level “trees” I mentioned earlier), and then streamlined them into three themes

(language skills, academic culture and sociocultural environment) (refer to Chapter three for details of my conceptual framework).

Coding all the data and sorting the data into the coding categories

As I mentioned previously, I imported all my verbatim interview data to NVIVO after I had finished transcribing. I then coded them by units of text at a thematic level. In NVIVO, it was useful to be able to see all the main themes at one glance. As guided by my supervisor, and using the guidance given in Taylor & Bogdan (1984), I coded all opinions which related to a category. For example, I covered both positive and negative comments about the pre-sessional programme which made it much easier to make the comparisons. It happened in my case that “some data fit into two or more coding categories” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p.129). For example, in the aforementioned examples 2 and 3, some data can fit into both “settling down” and “orientation” categories.

The following example shows how I aggregated my data in NVIVO. Using NVIVO was very easy for aggregating data around each theme. The example below provides a range of comments about expectations before coming to the UK. The example shows coded excerpts from two participants (Alice and Emily) taken from the three rounds of interviews.

Example 4

Free nodes: Expectation before coming to the UK

Document 'Alice last round interview1', 2 passages, 594 characters.

Section 0, Paragraph 461, 333 characters.

I see. OK, think about your motivation, before you came here, have you had any hope or wish for you to stay here, because just now as you mentioned study here is quite hard for you, so it must be big decision for you and your family. So before you came here, do you have any expectation about this one year, what you want to achieve?

Section 0, Paragraph 463, 261 characters.

Yeah, I wanted to improve my English, and want to study, en, many things. Even though I travelled many countries, I couldn't imagine how that would be before I came here. So I hope that I will learn something. Because I don't know if I have any particular hope, but...

Document 'Emily last round interview1', 5 passages, 1265 characters.

Section 0, Paragraphs 435-441, 217 characters.

So, talk about the course you are taking, so do you think have you got what you have expected from the course?

Yeah, I think more than that.

What did you mean?

I didn't expect that this academic year was so busy.

Section 0, Paragraphs 443-449, 325 characters.

What did you expect?

I expect that I would have much time to travel around, coming around with my friends.

Just like Japanese university.

Japanese university was like that?

Yeah, in Japan, it is hard to enter the university, to get the offer from the university,

but once you get the offer, it is really easy to graduate.

Section 0, Paragraphs 451-453, 100 characters.

OK. So before that you didn't expect that your life would be so busy.

Yeah, I didn't expect that.

Section 0, Paragraphs 503-505, 517 characters.

So about your subject learning, do you think that you have achieved whatever you want to get? And more than you have expected. How about besides your subject learning? Before you came here, what other expectation have you got from your overseas experience?

Well, I thought that I should have much more time to socialize with people, but I didn't. and I thought I should have many friends, major British, some English. But my course is full of Asian students. So in terms of that point, that was under my expectation.

Section 0, Paragraphs 507-509, 106 characters.

OK, so did you expect that you can speak good English and have an excellent English after one year?

Yeah.

4.10.3. Displaying qualitative data

After I had aggregated all the interview data on the tree nodes, I edited the data under each theme in a separate Word document. I went down the page, reading through all the data underneath this theme, and created one table for one interviewee, and each table represents one student's performance under this theme. In most cases there were eight tables. However, for some themes, such as "feedback/assessment", not all the students mentioned the points in their interview, so I did not have eight tables under all the categories. In each table I created a section in a column table, for example the first term, the second term and the third term to display data over time. I then filled in the tables with concise sentences from interview data. The following example provides a table which I made for Emily under the category of "Language

skills: motivation of learning and priority of learning”. See appendix 4 for tables I made for the other seven students under the same category.

Example 5

Language skills: motivation of learning and priority of learning

Emily

First round	Second round	Third round
	To study in the UK was a dream for a long time, so sell the car, quit the job, no house: two ambitions: a good English and to study the theory in the English language teaching field, expose herself in the real English speaking country	
	Motivated to make the most use of life because life here is limited and also it costs a lot in England so might not come to England again	

Table 4.4: Example of Emily

Having completed this, I had a sense of what were the most important themes to emerge, what was the characteristic of each theme, and how strongly these categories related to the feelings of the people involved. It was then possible for me to turn both the text and the sections of tables into an analytic passage. See the following example as an analytic description of students’ English language learning motivation.

Example 6

Motivation for learning English

The students' motivation to learn English fell into three broad categories.

1. highly motivated (Emily, Simon, Shirley, Max)
2. not very highly motivated, with a priority on subject study (Janet, James, Paul)
3. only partly motivated (Alice, Paul)

1. Highly motivated

Emily was highly motivated throughout the year because to come to study in the UK had been her dream for a long time. Before she came to the UK, she wanted to improve her English, and also to study theory in the English language teaching field. In order to realize her dream she used all her savings, sold her car, quit her job, so she was highly motivated to make the most of life in Green. She mentioned that to study in the UK was very expensive so this might be her last chance. She wanted to cherish every minute she could have in the UK.

Simon and Max were motivated to study English because the social-cultural environment made them feel that English was very important for their careers. This led them to design private study activities by themselves. In the first term Simon downloaded voice files from the internet and read them over time to improve his listening and speaking. In the second term he read a lot of books, tried to identify the key point and used them to get high marks in his

assignments. In the third term he rehearsed presentations several times for the purpose of improving his English skills. Similarly, Max tried to improve his English by reciting words, listening to MP3 and so on.

Shirley was highly motivated to study English which she saw as a survival skill. “I think the most important thing for me is environment. Because I agree someone said if you push yourself, or put yourself in the target language environment....if you don’t know well, if you can’t speak, you can’t write well, you can’t survive, it is for surviving!” (Shirley first round interview, paragraph 192-194).

2. Not very highly motivated, prioritised other things (Janet, James)

Janet did not have so much motivation to learn English because she saw herself as a quiet student, even in her first language, and she did not have any interest in talking in English. She liked to watch movies, sometimes she could watch three movies a day, but the main purpose of watching movies was recreation and relaxing. Improving English listening was not the reason she watched movies.

James was highly motivated when he started to learn English in junior high school. He obtained high scores in examinations at high school because he felt the pressure of university entrance examinations. “At first (when starting to learn English at junior high school) I liked English very much. I can imagine in the future I can use English fluently and I can communicate with my classmates or somebody else freely. But 11 years have passed, my English

does not reach the level I imagined, so” (James first round interview, paragraph 130-132). However, when he started his Master’s course in the UK, he found that his major subject study Financial Mathematics was the most important thing for him. In his first term, he forced himself to browse the website only in English and listened to the radio for the purpose of improving his English. In his second term, he browsed the internet for relaxing rather than learning English. In his third term, when he watched movies from his own computer, he felt too tired to listen in English so he selected the English subtitles. He was trying to listen to English radio before going to bed but he always felt very sleepy so he did not have much chance to listen.

3. Partly motivated (Alice, Paul)

Alice could be motivated to learn English given appropriate stimulation. For example “if I choose the right textbook, then I’d like to do it. I like to open the textbook. When I was a junior high school student, I liked my textbook. It was very colourful. And very pretty pictures” (Alice first round interview, paragraph 193). Encouraged by her tutor, Alice spoke English to her Japanese friends at the pre-sessional English course. However, when she started her Master’s course, she started to speak Japanese with Japanese students because she felt it was more natural. In her first term, Alice tried to recite useful phrases from an English text book, and tried to attend in-sessional English courses to improve her language ability. However, after one term Alice found that her English was still not as good as she expected, and she felt depressed because she thought that she really had tried her best. After getting advice from her friends, Alice learned to get rid of her depression and started to enjoy

her life more. She accepted she was not going to make rapid progress and spent less time on language learning.

Without giving a clear reason, Paul did not like learning English. He knew it was very important to have a good command of English but

“I don’t know. Maybe I think someone like something or someone don’t like something. Sometimes we don’t have any reason. But refuse, like when you...I don’t know...I feel I don’t like it. When I read long sentences, I start to hate it.” (Paul first round interview, paragraph 65-67).

He tried to improve his English because he knew that if he wanted to find a job in the UK or his home country, good English was necessary. However, as he said, “when I want to write something, I just fall asleep. And I don’t want to write it until I think it’s time to write because it’s nearly (time) to send my work.” (Paul first round interview, paragraph 247).

In these cameos are a range of motivations to get by in an environment in which English is spoken: motivation for academic study: intrinsic interest in the English language coupled with language learning.

4.10.4. Causality and consequences

Causality and consequences are issues that I need to take into consideration after I decided to present my data in a narrative way. Without a sense of causality and consequence, the whole narrative accounts would be random. I worked hard to draw out causality, drawing on different sources of evidence

and reached my consequences. I identified the causality and consequence in each student's experience in the following way:

Through the tables and descriptive passage (see example 5 and 6) I was able to draw out key incidences in different phases of each student's experience. The following example (example 7) shows the analysis I did before writing the account about Emily. After I had the key incidences, I compared and contrasted them with my conceptual framework. From the comparison I was able to pull out the actions which led to consequences. I did this by breaking down what looked like internal and external factors. See example 8 as an instance.

Example 7

Emily

In pre-arrival time

- a. had been to the UK ten years ago
- b. dreamed of studying in the UK since she was a teenager
- c. had worked as a high school teacher for eight years in Japan
- d. used up all her savings, sold the car and quit her job to pay for the expenses of a year abroad
- e. enjoyed travelling and had travelled to many places before
- f. was expecting 1) to be able to speak good English after one year, 2) to make many international friends, 3) to have much time for social life
- g. had met many native English speakers while in Japan, and had contact with them

- h. was highly motivated for overseas study
- i. planned in advance for social life, and prepared enough money

In pre-sessional course time

- a. enjoyed the time and studied hard at the four English language skills
- b. had good orientation to stay in the University, and was confident of English study

In the first term

- a. stayed in university accommodation, and had friendly flatmates
- b. had problems in communicating with international flatmates and classmates
- c. had problems in writing assignments and reading in English
- d. watched English TV though she could not fully understand
- e. had been to pubs and parties several times
- f. travelled to Italy during Christmas

In the second term

- a. had to do a project with team mates and learned how to express meanings in English politely
- b. improved English writing and reading
- c. realized the difference in her levels of proficiency in writing English and writing Japanese after receiving lower grade from assignments
- d. tried to find a job in Japan during Easter vacation

In the third term

- a. was busy in doing assignment
- b. was busy in doing dissertation
- c. was worrying about the future
- d. improved spoken English and could talk freely in English

In general

A. Time at Green University

- a. felt lucky because she met nice flatmates
- b. appreciated the friendly relationship with tutors
- c. was satisfied with overseas study
- d. gained more confidence and developed independent thinking styles
- e. was pleased to meet people from all over the world which enriched her personality
- f. had confidence in using ICT

B. Religion

- a. had no religious belief

Example 8

The **consequence** of Emily's year abroad experience was

Improved English language skills in terms of speaking, reading and writing---
learned how to do presentations, group work, how to behave in another

culture--- gained more confidence--- enjoyed life--- gained cross cultural competence---was satisfied about her year abroad experience

The **causality** would be

Dreamed of studying abroad for more than ten years--- used up all her savings--- was highly motivated--- had overseas experience before coming to the UK--- proactive---met good flatmates--- had helpful peers and tutors--- took part in social activities--- had no financial constraint

4.10.5. Data display: narrative analysis

After I created tables, had an analytic description for each student under each theme and identified the key incidents in different phases of the students' experience, I was faced with the challenge of presenting my data in a readable and representative way. I was advised to use narrative analysis to display my research findings, though I was also warned that a common problem in writing any account is that the writer may present the events as too precise or too clear. When people were living their lives, they did not know why they were doing certain things, but when they were talking about it, they gave justification and rationalisations. In this sense, all the narrative accounts are contrived. It was a dilemma for me but the narrative analysis is a best fit in my case. The reasons are as follows:

1) Polkinghorne (1988) gave a definition of narrative as “the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful” (p.11). In a

similar way, Cortazzi (2001) claimed that “narrative research offers the possibility of allowing a fairly immediate investigation into the organisation of social and cognitive interpretations, whether the focus is on the process of interpretation or on the events interpreted” (p.385). To gain an insider’s perspective and to understand my participants’ language and cultural learning processes is the main focus of my research. So to adopt a narrative analysis gave me a better chance to present my participants’ cross-cultural adjustment process.

2) As I stated in the literature review chapters (see chapter 2), the study of international Asian students’ experience in the UK is an under-developed area, so to use narrative analysis gave my readers a chance to know the experience of this particular group (Cortazzi, 2001).

3) Polkinghorne (1995) claimed that “Human action is the outcome of the interaction of a person’s previous learning and experience, present-situated presses, and proposed goals and purpose... unlike objects, in which knowledge of one can be substituted for another without loss of information, human actions are unique and not fully replicable...” (p.11). The data I collected from my interview, research diary and questionnaire survey were considerable, and how to make my data coherent, interesting and explanatory was always a question for me. The use of narrative analysis provided me with an opportunity, as it “focuses on the particular and special characteristics of each action” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.11).

4) Though “research on residence and study abroad is a new field” (Byram & Feng, 2006), there are many researchers who have adopted narrative analysis to present their data when they were doing research on sojourners’ experience of studying and living abroad (e.g. Alred & Byram, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Ehrenreich, 2006). In every other discipline in the social sciences, narrative research has been engaged by some scholars (Cortazzi, 1993), as “narrative inquiry is one of many kinds of research that are part of the research approaches that have been gathered under the umbrella of qualitative research” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.21). At one extreme there have been ethnographers who have presented a single in-depth case study, for example, in religious studies, Brown’s (2001) “Mama Lola: a vodou priestess in Brooklyn”. In this case, the entire report is one narrative.

5) My data analysis led me to use narrative analysis to present my data. When I drew the key incidents from my data, I found my key incidents have the functions that Polkinghorne (1995) required for a “plot” in narrative analysis. The plot, as Polkinghorne (1995) claimed, is “the narrative structure through which people understand and describe the relationship among the events and choices of their lives” (p.7). According to Polkinghorne (1995), the criteria for a “plot” are:

- “a. delimiting a temporal range which marks the beginning and end of the story
- b. providing criteria for the selection of events to be included in the story

c. temporally ordering events into an unfolding movement culminating in a conclusion

d. clarifying or making explicit the meaning events have as contributors to the story as a unified whole” (p.7).

6) I have adopted a first-person account from the beginning of this thesis, which will be consistent with my narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993). In addition, the number of my participants was not large as I had only eight interview participants. The two limitations (first-person account, number of subjects) which Riessman (1993) mentioned were not obstacles in my study.

For the above six reasons, I used narrative analysis to display my qualitative data. I am aware of the problems of writing narrative accounts (see page 87). In order to produce confidence in my readers that the event has really occurred, I used the triangulation method to reduce the worries because I did not want to rely only on the narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). The next chapter, the findings from my questionnaire survey, can be some help in increasing confidence in the events in my narrative analysis.

At a later stage, narrative analysis led to modelling and discussion which are covered in chapter eight, which can be referred to for further details.

4.11. Ethical Issues

I had access to my research group because of an opportunity to support the pre-sessional programme. When I decided to carry out the case study with some of them, I was honest and open about my research topic, the ways I was going to conduct my research and the time they might spend with me. I got oral consent from all of my participants. Furthermore, my work passed the ethical issue check in my department (Institute of Education, University of Warwick). See appendix 5 for reference.

As the first page of my questionnaire, I wrote a covering letter to participants to explain my research purpose and the anonymity and confidentiality I would guarantee in my research (see appendix 6 for reference). Similarly, at the start of every interview, I explained my interview purpose and the time they might spend on the interview. I told all of my interviewees that none of their personal information or data would be disclosed to a third party without their permission. They had the right to refuse to be interviewed at any time. Also, I promised them that I would send a copy of the interview transcript. They were welcome to make any changes after they had gone through the transcripts.

In writing this thesis, I substituted pseudonyms for all the participants' names, for the city where they were staying, and for the university where they were studying. I was very clear that all the people who were involved in my questionnaires and interviews contributed their time to me, so I always remembered to send a "thank you" email after my interview. In order to show

my sincere appreciation of their time and efforts, after I finished my field work, I downloaded recipes from the internet or learned from other friends who were good at cooking, before inviting my case study sample to have dinner. It was a good way to show my goodwill (Bell, 1991).

4.12. Summary

In this chapter I explained the process of conducting my research, the problems I have encountered and the efforts I have made to solve them. I also explained the ways data were collected, and how I analysed them. Examples have been given to illustrate my research approach.

In the following three chapters, I will introduce my research findings, which are the results of data analysis.

Chapter 5 Questionnaire findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter and the following two chapters present the findings of the current study. In this study, three dimensions: language skills, academic culture and socio-cultural environment are the principal foci of the analysis. This chapter discusses the research findings from questionnaire surveys, and it mainly focuses on language skills. The following two chapters will discuss the findings from the interviews and the research diary. As I outlined in Chapter 4, the survey findings are mainly presented in a descriptive fashion in order to identify longitudinal changes. The survey report is divided into eleven sections.

5.2. Before coming to the UK

In term one students were asked about their preparations before coming to the UK. Most of the students selected and packed clothes, chose study materials and some English books (see figure 5.1). The study materials that students prepared were comprised of stationery, dictionary, notebooks, and some specific academic books.

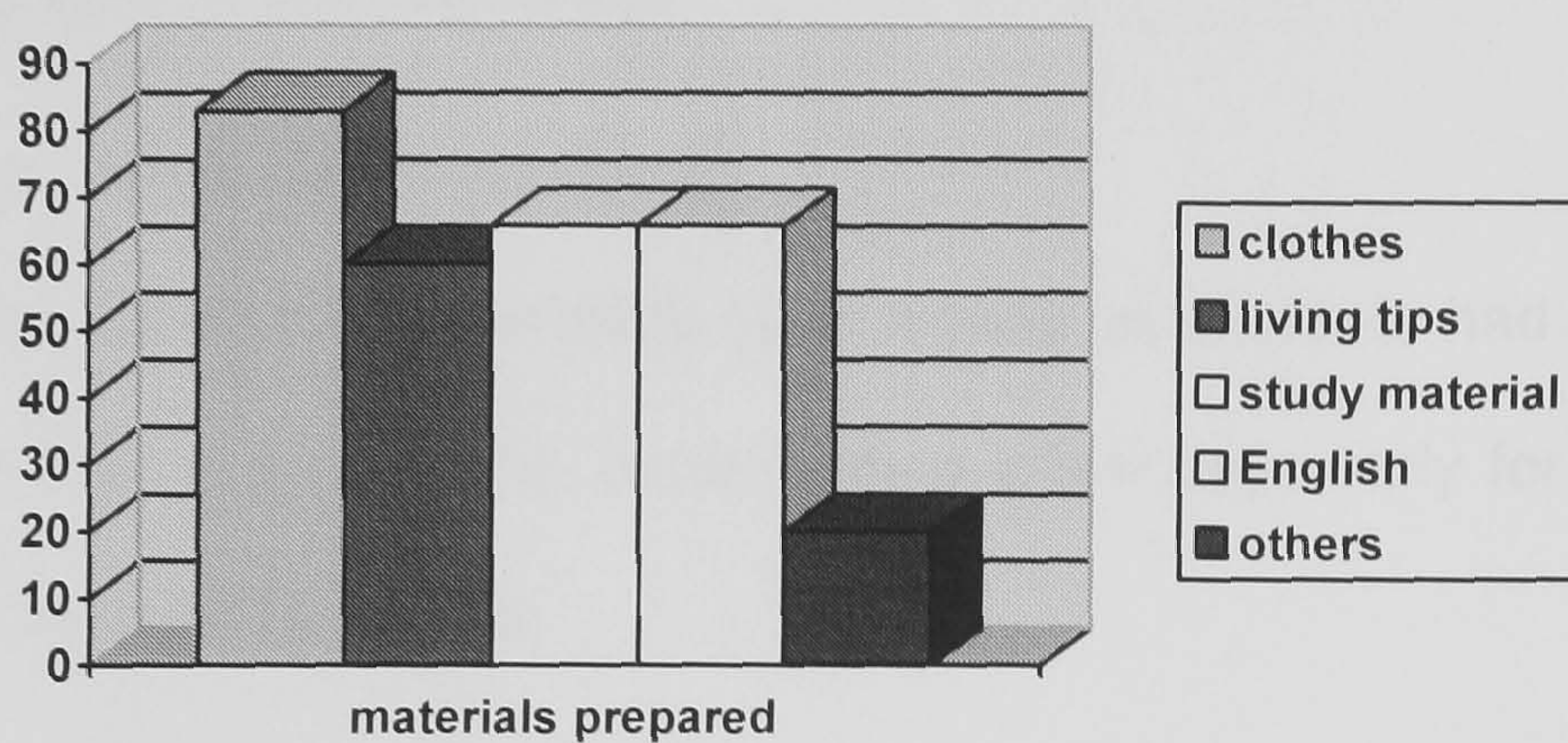


Figure 5.1: What I prepared before coming to the UK

Examining the sources of information shows that the internet was a very important resource for international students to gain information before they came to the UK, with 88.6% of the information being derived from this source. Second to the internet was “word of mouth” from friends and relatives; agencies were other helpful ways for gaining information, which accounted for 54.3% (see figure 5.2).

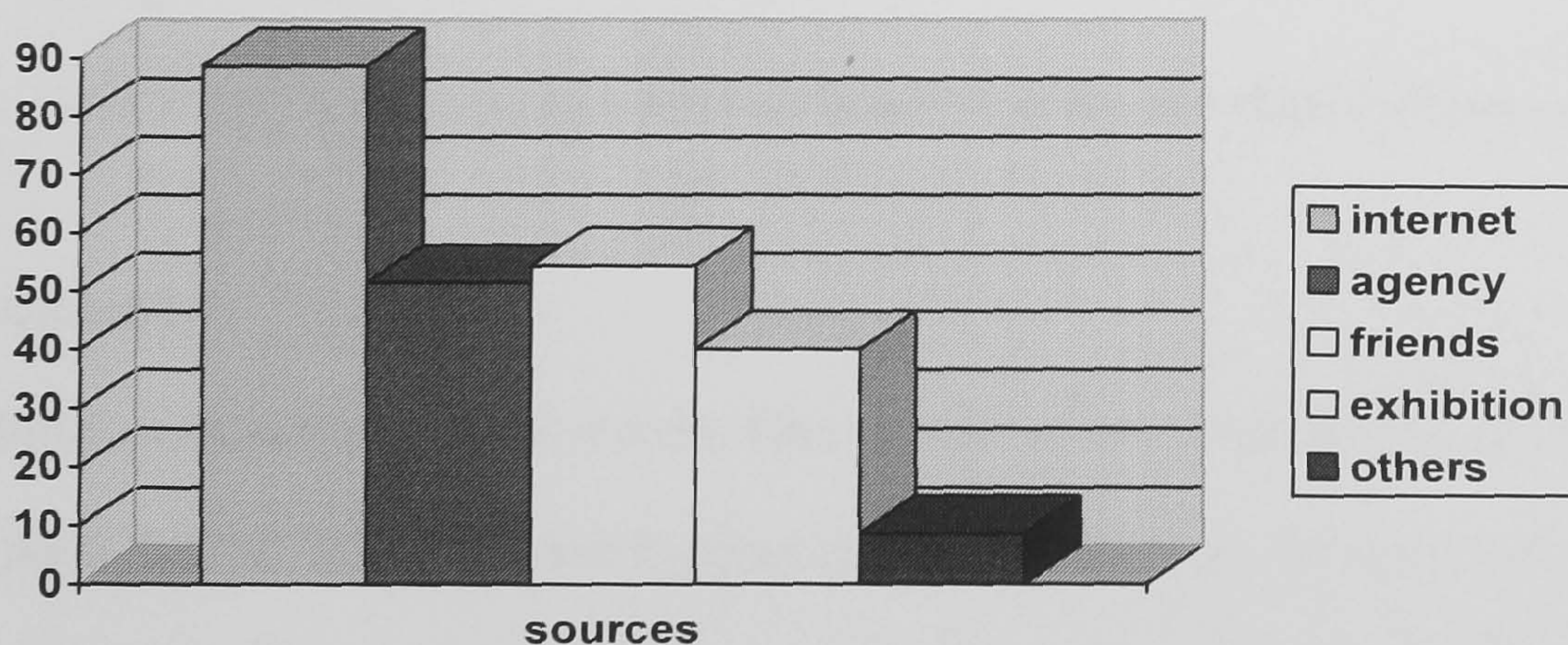


Figure 5.2: Sources of information that students had before coming to the UK

5.3. Biographical data

a. length of stay in the UK

At the start of the academic year, nearly all students had been in the UK for less than three months, most coming a few days early for their pre sessional course (see figure 5.3).

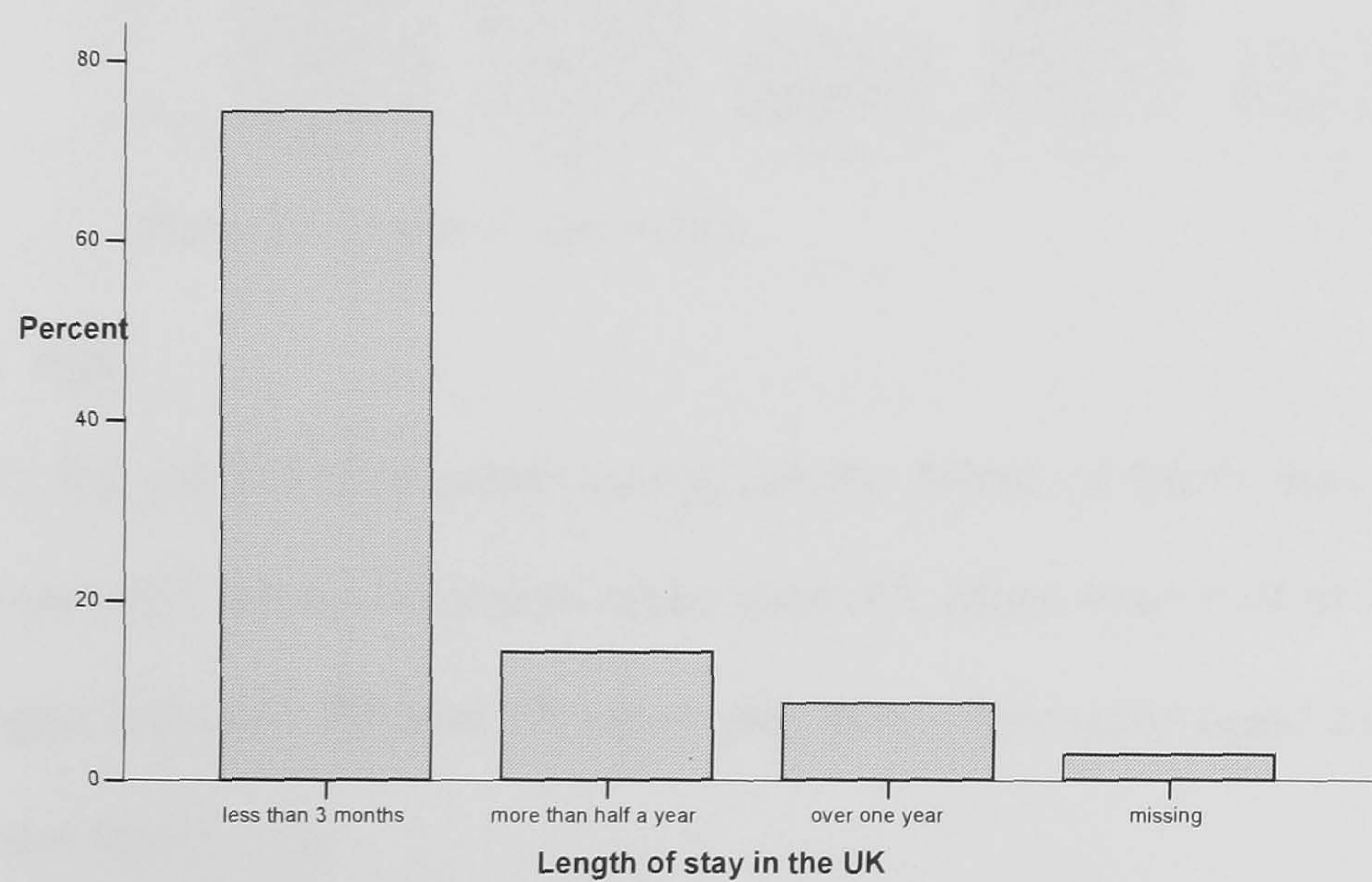


Figure 5.3: How long students had been in the UK at the start of the academic year

b. Nationality

Students' nationalities were mixed. Nearly half of the participants were from mainland China, and the next biggest groups were from Taiwan and Japan and a few students were from Thailand and South Korea (see figure 5.4).

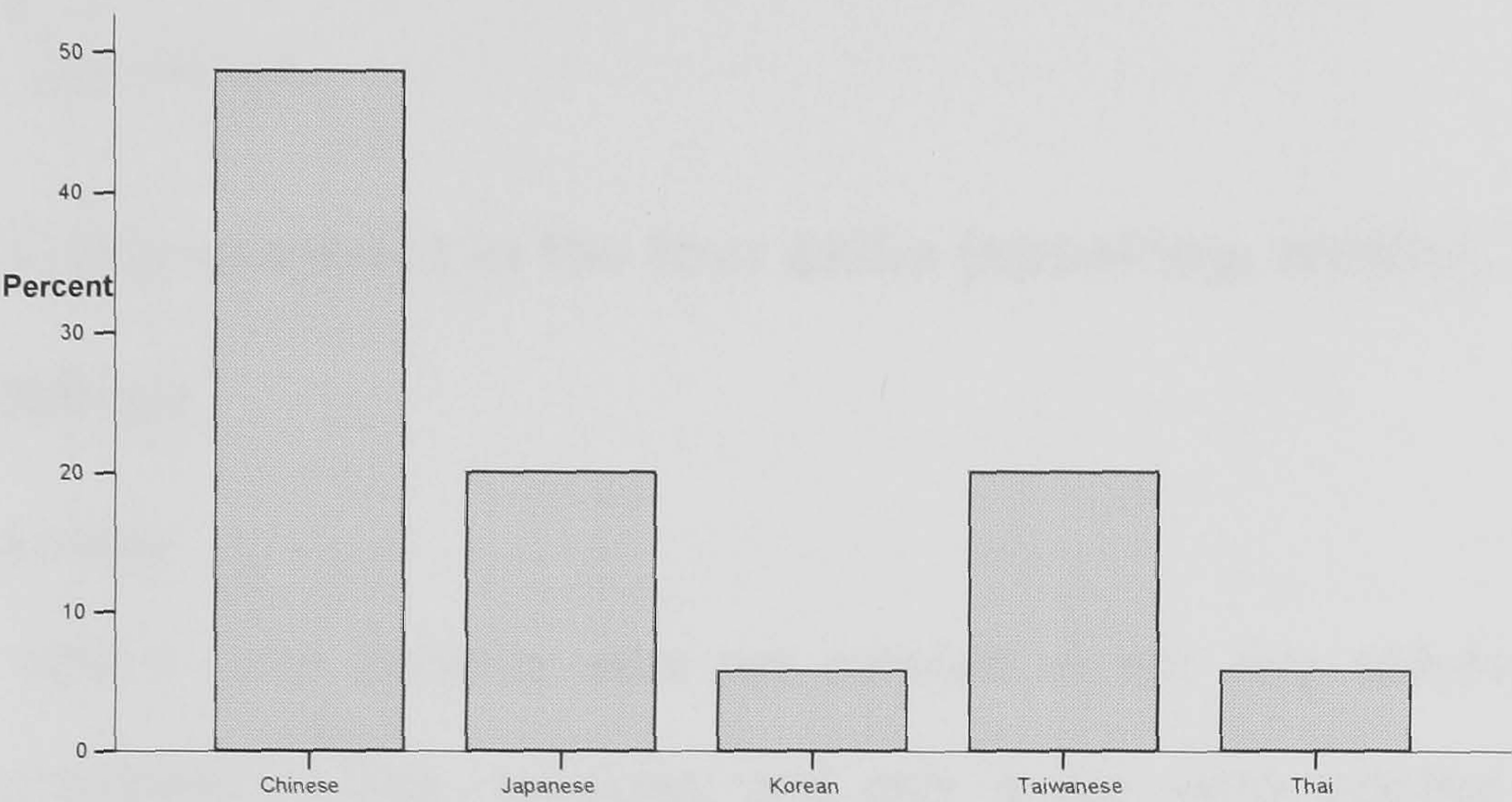


Figure 5.4: Students' nationality

c. Age

All the participants were young adults. None of them was younger than 18 years old, while none was older than 40. More than half of the students were aged between 22 and 25 years old, and a few were aged between 18 and 22 (see figure 5.5).

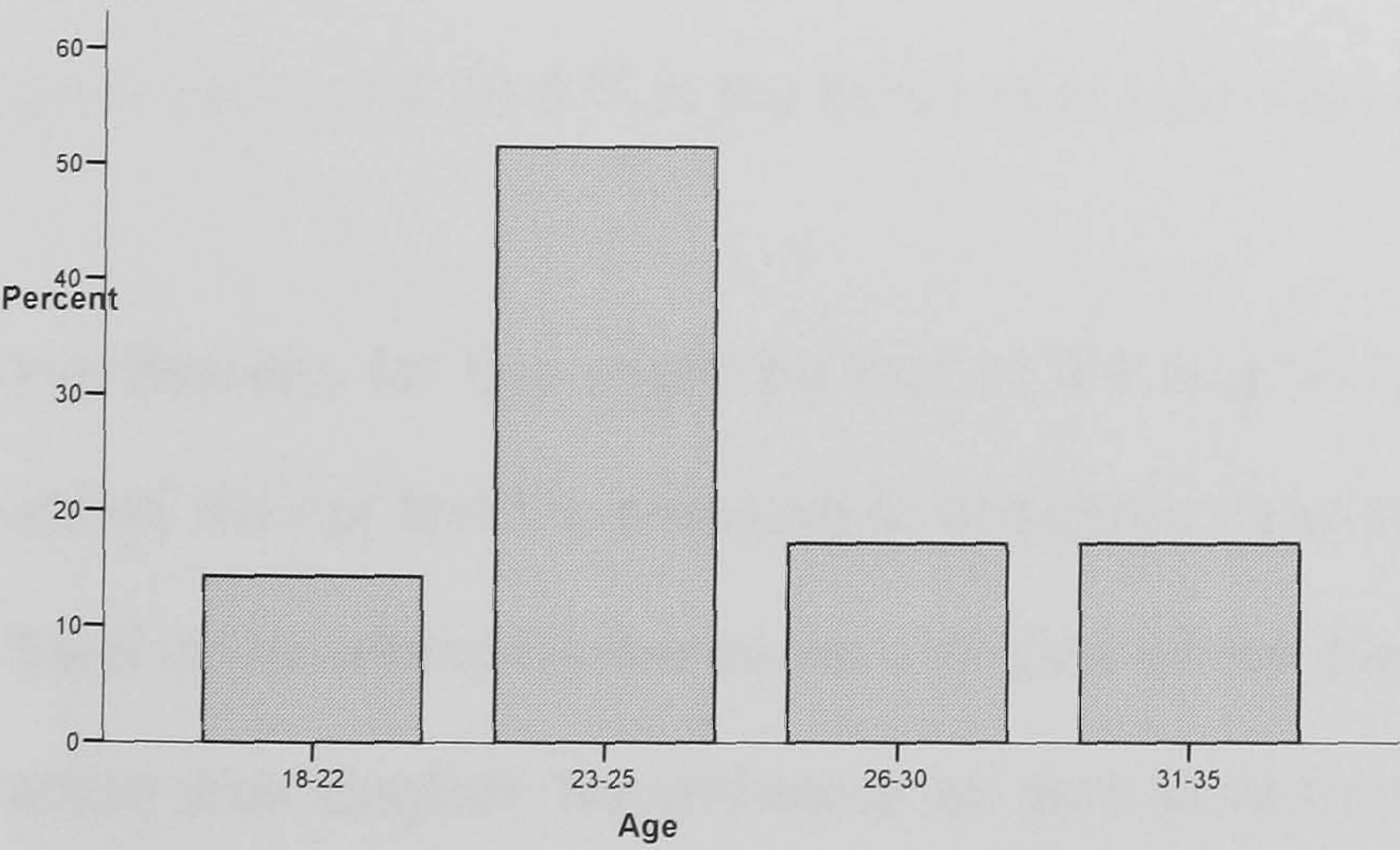


Figure 5.5: Age of students

d. Gender

The gender of the students was divided almost evenly —19 were male while 21 were female.

5.4. Improvement in the four skills (speaking, writing, listening reading)

Speaking

In term 1 most students were not satisfied or not very satisfied with the improvement in their speaking; and only a few were satisfied with their improvement. Term 2 showed a very similar pattern. However, in term 3 more students than before were not satisfied or not very satisfied with the improvement in their speaking skills, while just a few students were satisfied with their improvement.

Comparing the three stages, the level of satisfaction decreased over time from a percentage of 40% in the first round, decreasing to 39.4% in the second round and 20.9 % in the third round (see figure 5.6).

Some reasons for this might be that at the beginning of the academic year students did not feel the pressure of assignments or tests, so they were more relaxed about attending the social activities where they had more chances to practise their English. Nevertheless as time went on students felt the impact of demands of their course and their assignments. Their priority was to finish assignments or tests. They had to reduce the frequency of attending social events and concentrated more on their study and compared with earlier, the

opportunities for speaking English were fewer. This might have made the students feel less satisfied about their spoken English in terms 2 and 3 than at the beginning of the academic year. The other reason could be that before students came to the UK, most of them had very high expectations of their improvement in English. However, after staying in the UK for half a year or one year, some students found that their spoken English improvement was not as fast as they expected. Therefore some of them felt dissatisfied.

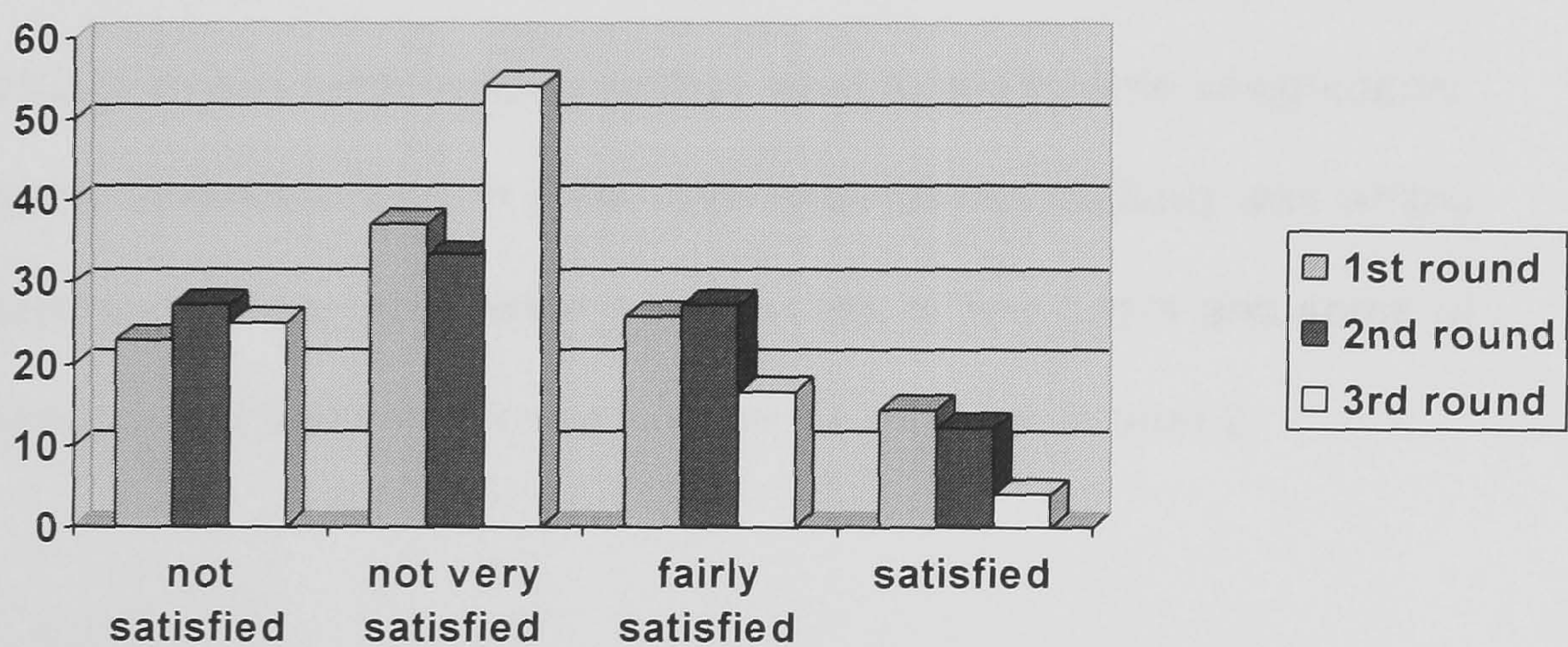


Figure 5.6: How satisfied are you with your improvement in speaking over time

Writing

In term 1, most were not satisfied or not very satisfied with the improvement in their writing skills while only a few were. However, in term 2 the picture changed. More than half were satisfied or fairly satisfied with their improvement in writing, while some were not satisfied. In term 3 most of students were not satisfied or not very satisfied with their improvement in writing, while a few students were satisfied with their improvement.

Comparing the three stages, the level of satisfaction changed in waves over time with a percentage of 34.3 % in the first round, 57.6 % in the second round and 45.8% in the third round (see figure 5.7).

Reasons for the change of satisfaction in each term might be that at the beginning of term 1, most of the students had not been asked to write any academic work so they did not have much chance to improve their writing formally. In term 2 and term 3 the majority of the students had to have an intensive focus on academic writing, as they were asked to write assignments, examinations, or reports. In term 3 the main work for the students was writing their dissertation. There were fewer opportunities to see tutors and some of the students thought that they did not improve as much as in term 2.

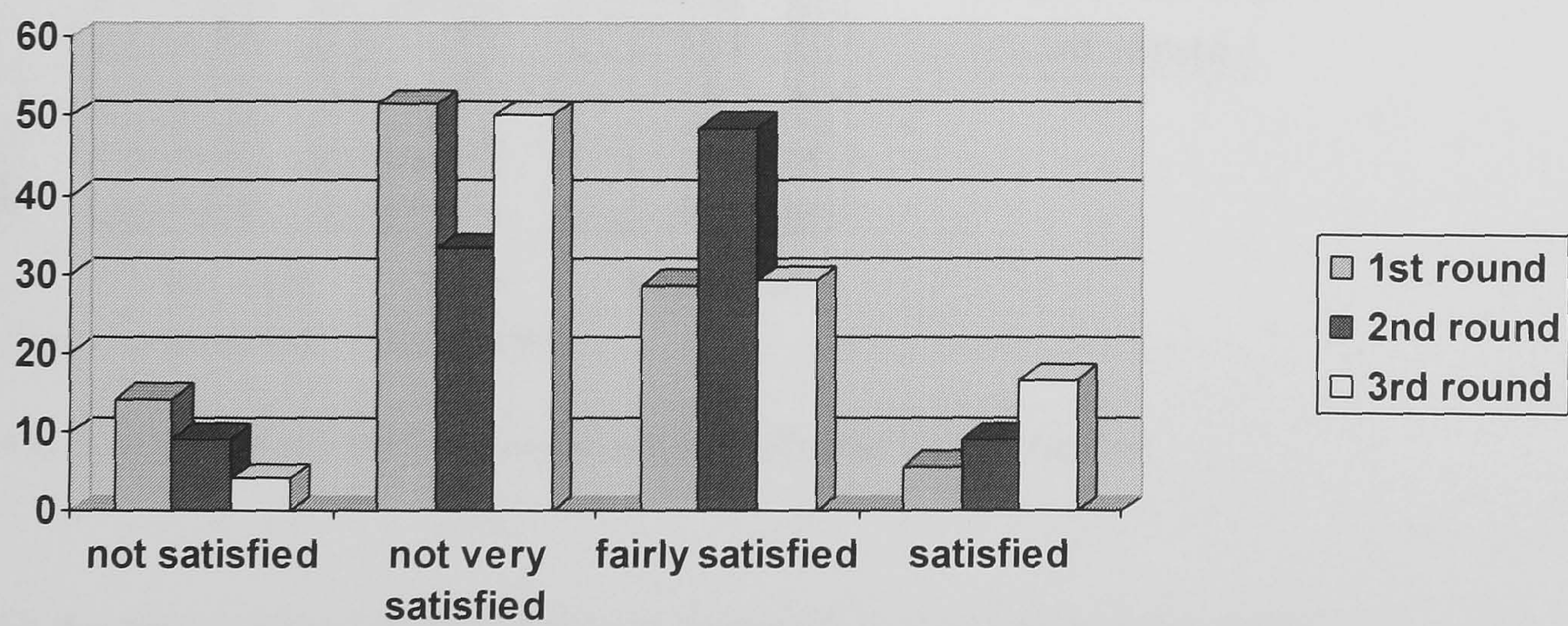


Figure 5.7: How satisfied are you with improvement in writing, results over time

Listening

In term 1, most were satisfied or fairly satisfied with their improvement in listening while a few were not satisfied.

As with term 1, in term 2 most students were satisfied or fairly satisfied with their improvement in listening while a few were not satisfied. In term 3 over half of the students were satisfied or fairly satisfied with their improvement in listening while less than half of the students were not satisfied with their improvement. Comparing the three stages, the levels of satisfaction were fairly consistent especially between term 1 and term 2 but decreased a little in term 3; the percentages were 65.7 % in the first round, 66.7% in the second round and 54.2% in the third round (see figure 5.8).

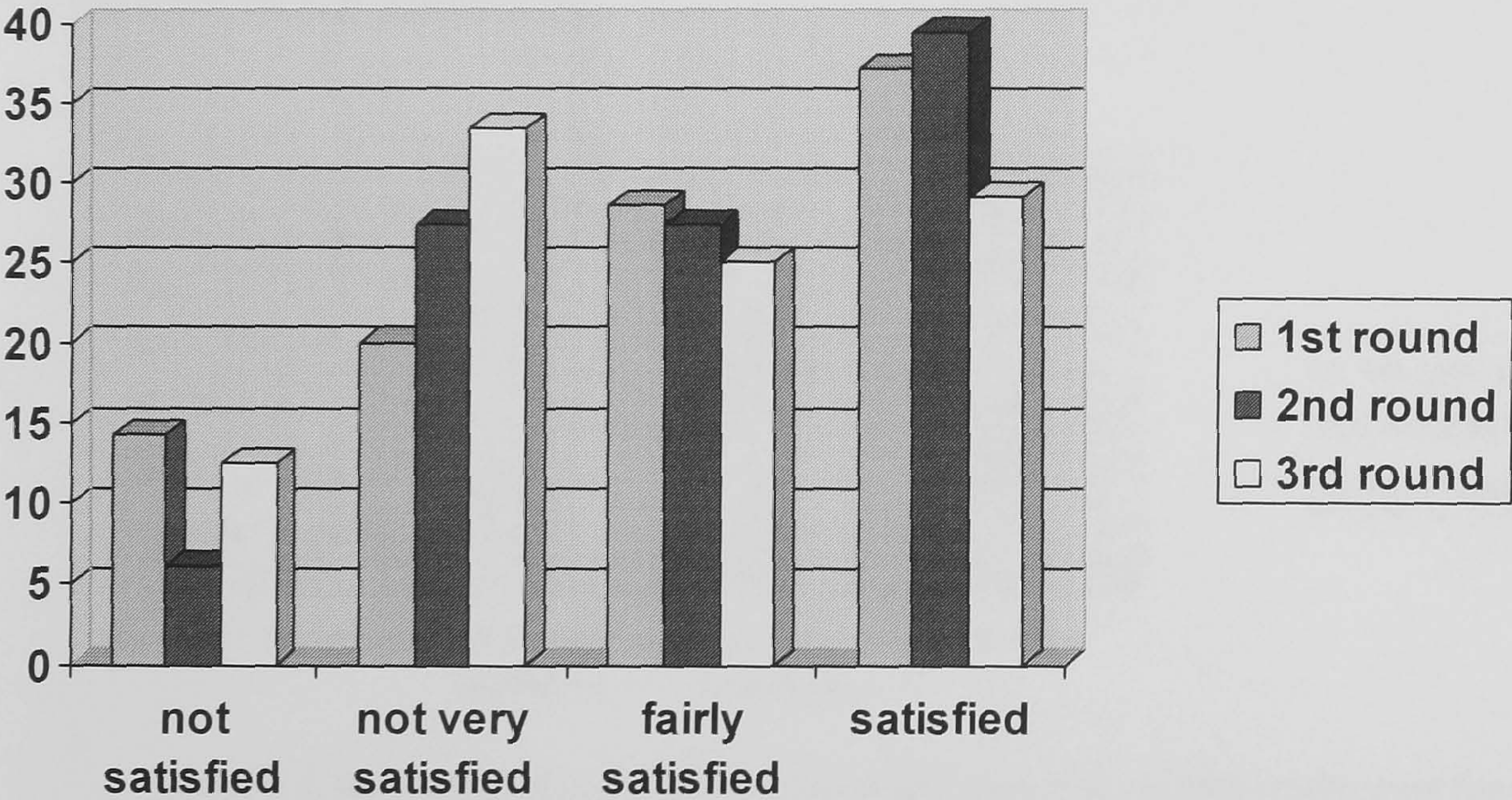


Figure 5.8: How satisfied are you with your improvement in listening results over time

The reason for this might be that consistent demands for listening were made throughout the three terms because they listened to English all the time. But in term 3 students had fewer lectures and had less intensive listening opportunities and so some of them might not be as satisfied as before.

Reading

In term 1 more than half of the students were not satisfied or not very satisfied with their improvement in reading, while some were satisfied with their improvement. In contrast to term 1, in term 2 more than half of the students were satisfied, or fairly satisfied, with their improvement in reading while some were not. In term 3 most of the students were satisfied or fairly satisfied with their improvement in reading while just a few students were not. Comparing the three stages, the level of satisfaction increased over time with a percentage of 45.7 % in the first round, 59.4% in the second round and 66.7% in the third round (figure 5.9).



Figure 5.9: How satisfied are you with your improvement in reading results over time

The reasons for the increasing level of satisfaction with reading might be consistent practice over three terms, with no reduction in the third term because they needed to read for their dissertation.

5.5. Confidence with grammar

In term 1 most students were not confident or not very confident, with their English grammar and English sentence writing structure while only a few were.

In contrast to term 1, in term 2 just over half of the students were confident or fairly confident with their English grammar and English sentence writing structure, while some of the students were not. As with term 2, in term 3 more than half of the students were confident or fairly confident with their English grammar and English sentence writing structure while just less than half of the students were not confident or not very confident. Comparing the three stages, the level of confidence increased over time with a percentage of 37.1% in the first round, 57.6 % in the second round and 59.3 % in the third round (see figure 5.10). This is similar to assessment of improvement in reading with a pattern of consistently increasing development.

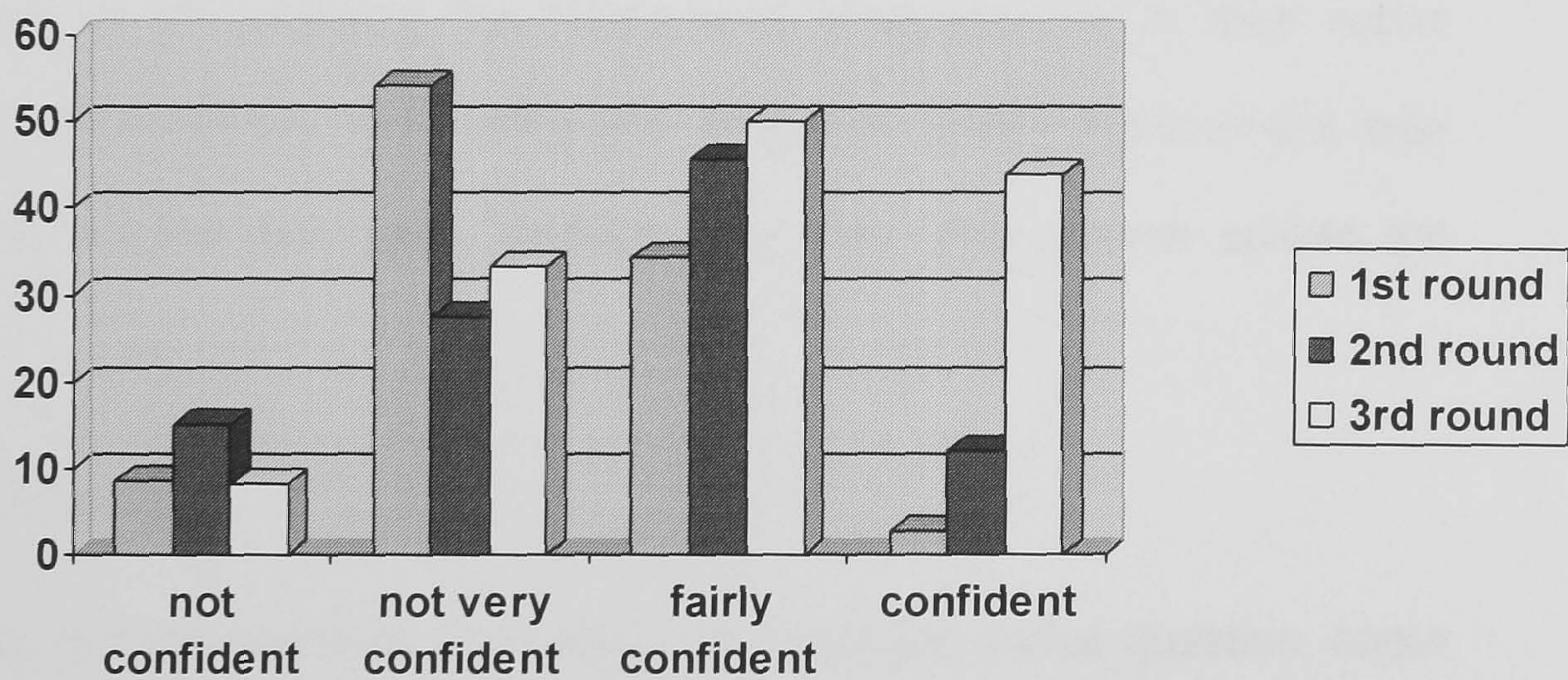


Figure 5.10: How confident do you feel about your use of grammar, results over time

5.6. Confidence in language skills

In terms 1 and 2 nearly half felt more confident in reading; while in term 3 most students were more confident in speaking. Only a few students were confident in writing over the whole year (see figure 5.11).

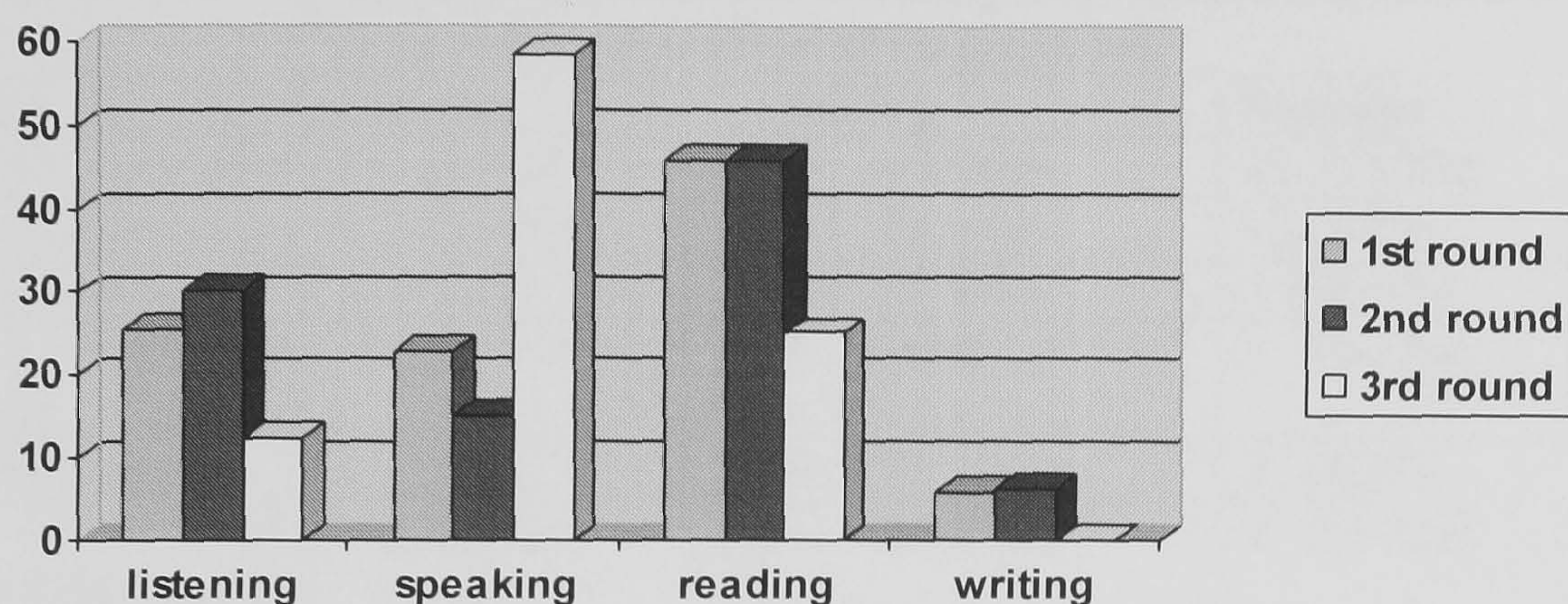


Figure 5.11: Confidence in 4 language skills compared over time

The survey overall suggests on the whole that students were satisfied with their improvement in language skills. However this did not result in a feeling of confidence, or of achieving the same level of fluency as in their native language. Furthermore, the perceived language skills improvement was uneven across the four skills, uneven over time, and uneven across the sample.

5.7. Problems

In all three surveys students were asked, in a multiple choice question, about the problems they experienced with regard to writing. Table 5.1 shows that lack of vocabulary was a big concern for students throughout the year. Other responses such as “lack of feedback”, “lack of practice” “unsure what is expected” indicated problems which prevented students from writing well in English.

	Number of students selecting this item as a problem for them (with percentage of respondents)		
Problem	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Lack of vocabulary	29 (82.9%)	20 (60.6%)	13 (54.2%)
Lack of feedback	8 (22.9%)	20 (60.6%)	12 (50%)
Lack of practice	15 (42.9)	9 (27.3%)	5 (20.8%)
Unsure what is expected	10 (28.6%)	12 (36.4)	7 (29.2%)
Have no interest	3 (8.6%)	7 (21.2%)	2 (8.3%)
Lack of cooperation with tutor	10 (28.6%)	6 (18.2%)	9 (37.5%)
Lack of cooperation with peers	7 (20%)	9 (27.3%)	5 (20.8%)
others	6 (17.1%)	4 (12.1%)	1 (4.2%)

Table 5.1 Problems in writing over time

Lack of practice and lack of feedback were two of the most interesting themes here. Lack of vocabulary could be seen as the responsibility of the students themselves. When students talked about lack of feedback, they were talking about other people, and what other people were doing for them. There was perhaps a shift over time. At the beginning students thought they were not doing well in writing because they did not have enough vocabulary, or did not practise enough. However later on they raised the lack of effective feedback as a major issue and were able to see their problems in a wider context.

5.8. Help

In all three surveys students were asked in a multiple choice question about what would be helpful if they were to improve their writing. Table 5.2 shows that most students thought feedback from tutors throughout the year would be very helpful. More than half of the students thought the use of models of

writing would help them improve their own writing. Other methods which were regarded as helpful for most of the students in their responses were tutor support and computer based support.

	Number of students selecting this item as a problem for them (with percentage of respondents)		
Types of help	Autumn	Spring	Summer
Feedback from tutors	25 (71.4%)	23 (69.7%)	13 (54.2%)
Models of writing	19 (54.3%)	19 (57.6%)	12 (50%)
Tutor support	14 (40%)	20 (60.6%)	9 (37.5%)
Self-study materials	13 (37.1%)	18 (54.5%)	10 (41.7%)
Computer-based support	7 (20%)	17 (51.5%)	7 (29.2%)
Specific English support class	9 (25.7%)	13 (39.4%)	8 (33.3%)
Peer support	6 (17.1%)	14 (42.4%)	7 (29.2%)
Others	2 (5.7%)	0	0

Table 5.2: sources of help that would be helpful to improve writing over time

Again, one of the themes was that students wanted feedback from tutors. They wanted tutor support. They wanted somebody to advise them about what they should do. But another interesting point was that they wanted the help to be contextual, in terms of being subject specific, rather than in the form of general language classes. They wanted language support classes that could help them pass their modules. On the other hand, they also wanted to be responsible for their own study, through private study, or access to models of study so they could practise in their own time.

In the first and second term students were also asked in an open ended question what the university could provide to help them improve their English (see Table 5.3). In term 1 the most frequent suggestion was that students

ought to have access to an individual personal tutor. Also, to have some special classes was regarded as important. In term 2, the most frequent suggestion was that students ought to have a language consultant who could understand their special needs. Responses have been grouped around 5 themes.

	Term 1	Term 2
Special tutor (consultant)	10	13
Special class	9	1
In-sessional class	3	4
Space and opportunity	2	3
Social activities	2	1

Table 5.3 Suggestions for improving English

To have special teachers who could tailor their courses to students’ personal interest was the most popular choice among students all the time. Maybe students thought that a one to one service, that is, someone who could give them effective feedback was more helpful.

When reflecting on the students’ perception of problems, it is interesting to note that in part they see the main problem as their own deficiency in vocabulary. When students identify lack of feedback as problematic, they are concerned about a lack of clarity as to what is expected of them and how their writing might become a means of addressing those expectations. Once the issue of feedback is identified as the central problem the students put forward,

they come up with the ideas of how they might get better feedback, and how to get better assistance.

5.9. Second language use

Movies, newspapers and novels

In term 1, term 2 and term 3 the majority of the students indicated that they often watched English movies (in English) and read English newspapers (see table 5.4). On the other hand less than half of the students read English novels. We might assume from this that English novels are far less popular, perhaps because they are seen as being less accessible, than movies and newspapers.

	Term 1	Term 2	Term 3
	Yes / No	Yes / No	Yes / No
movies	85.7%/14.3%	93.9%/6.1%	100%/0
novels	48.6%/51.4%	36.4%/63.6%	60%/40%
newspapers	74.3%/25.7%	90.9%/9.1%	92%/8%

Table 5.4: Percentages of students who had watched a film; read a novel or a newspaper in English between rounds of survey.

I did not ask students questions about their use of television because from interviews and my observation I knew that most of the students were living in university accommodation and they did not have television in their hall. One reason might be that in the UK to watch television legally you need to buy a TV licence while in most of the Asian countries watching television is free. Students were reluctant to accept this regulation. On the other hand, the internet was very popular among students. Normally students knew where and how to download the latest movies free of charge, most of the students

often watched movies from their own laptop. In most cases, when students read newspapers they just read part of them.

5.10. Academic life and ICT

In term 1, term 2 and term 3, most students agreed that they could achieve more if they were confident in using ICT. On the other hand, in term 1, term 2 and term 3, a few thought confidence about using ICT could not help them to achieve more in academic life (see figure 5.12). This suggests that ICT is very important for postgraduate international students and most believed that ICT made a strongly positive contribution to their academic life.

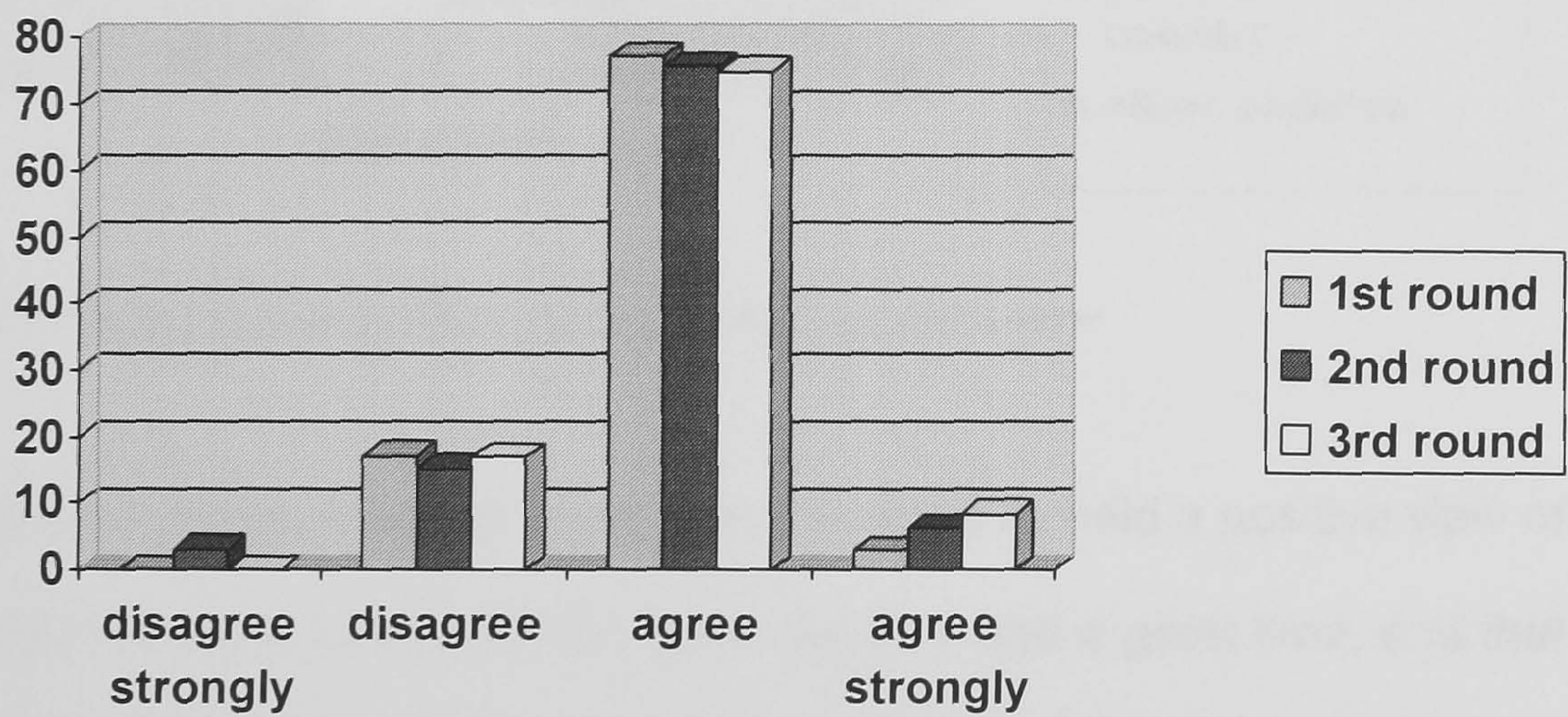


Figure 5.12: Does ICT help with study?

5.11. Life satisfaction

In term 3, students were asked whether they were happy with their life in the UK. Twenty-two out of twenty-four said they had had a happy year in Green University, while only 2 said they were not happy. It is worth emphasising at this point that, in spite of language problems, students still thought that they had a good time in the university.

5.12. Future plans

In the last round questionnaire, the last question was about students' future plans. Figure 5.13 shows that more than half of the students wanted to go home after they finished their course. About another half of them wanted to stay in the UK either for further study or to find jobs.

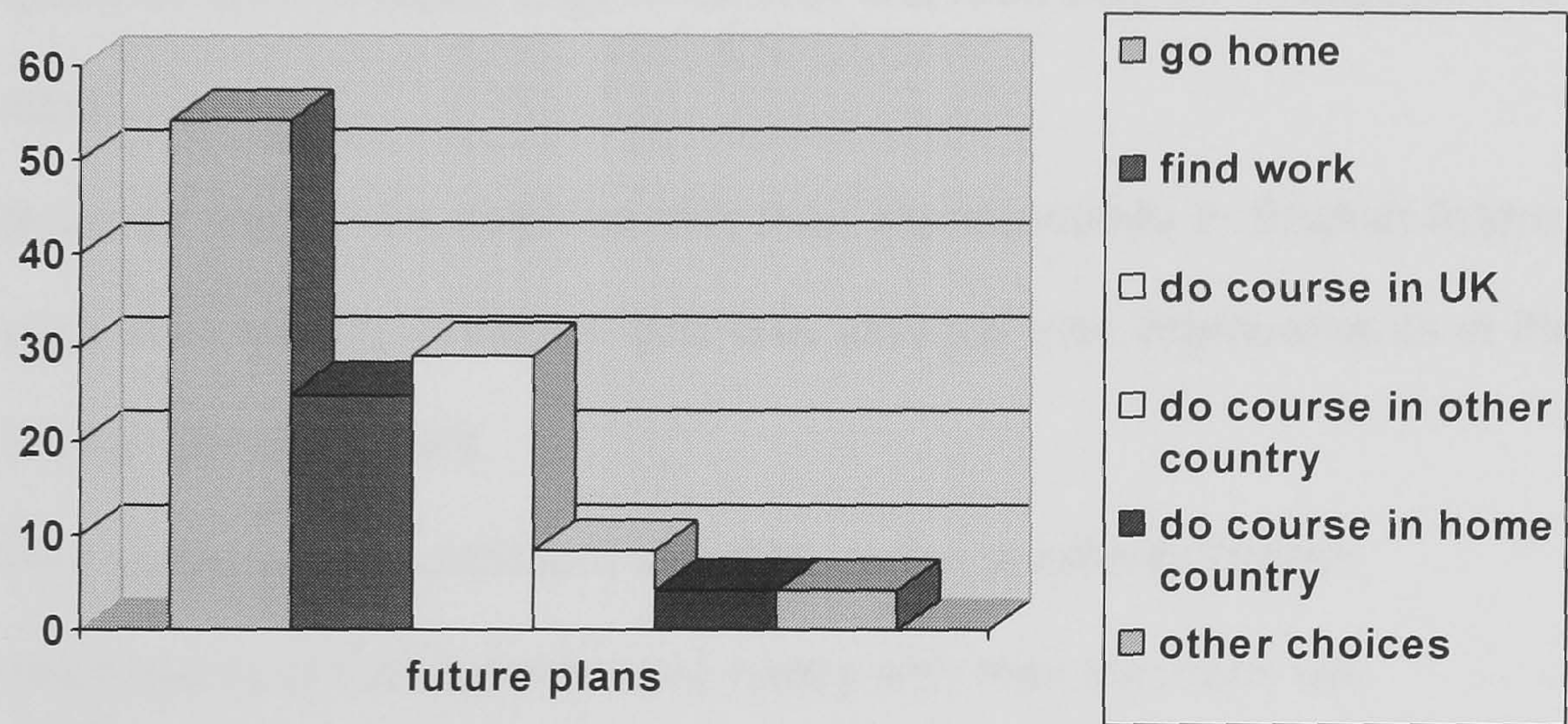


Figure 5.13: What do you intend doing on finishing your course

Taken together, these results suggest that the students held a positive view of their decision to study in the UK. Students felt they had a good time, and that they remained ambitious indicating some degree of optimism about their future plans.

5.13. Summary

From the questionnaire findings, one is able to examine various factors that influence the students' development, namely those of: the participants' preparation before coming to the UK, biographical data, various aspects (such as language confidence, language problems) which have a bearing on the

acquisition of English language skills over time, ICT use, overall life satisfaction and plans for the future. Key findings were:

- All the participants were young adults.
- The majority of the participants who came to Green University for postgraduate study had never been to the UK before.
- Students liked to watch English movies and read English newspapers very much.
- Students were most satisfied with their improvements in English listening skills after staying in the UK and less satisfied with improvements in their English speaking skills.
- Few students were confident with their ability to write in English.
- The majority of the students were happy with their life in the UK.
- Students felt that access to feedback from tutors and models of writing were two of the most helpful forms of assistance that might help them to improve their writing skills.
- Students thought lack of vocabulary and lack of feedback were two of the biggest problems when writing in English.
- Students thought the use of ICT was helpful in improving their academic skills.
- Most students suggested that the university should provide support tutors who could understand their special requirements.
- Before coming to the UK: most of the students had prepared practical materials (such as stationery or study materials) for their period of study.
- More than half of the students planned to go back to their home country after they finished their postgraduate courses.

In the following two chapters, I will present the findings from analysis of my interviews and research diary.

Chapter 6 Interview and research diary findings (1)

6.1. Introduction

The purpose of this and the following chapter is to present the research findings from qualitative data. Within the general picture of the physical and sociocultural environment in which students stayed in the academic year of 2004/2005, the narrative analysis of interview and research diary data enabled a closer examination of the experiences of a small number of students (N= 8). Firstly biographical details about these students are provided in Table 6.1. Next this chapter presents the first three cases which, as discussed in detail in chapter 8, represent more stable patterns of integration.

“name”	Nationality	Area of study (undergraduate)	Area of study (Master’s course)	Age (2004)	Gender	Key experiences of language learning in the past	Academic background	Key motivation for study
Paul	Thai	Engineering	Economics and Finance	24	Male	Studied English formally at school, one month summer course in UK as a teenager	Academically successful in home country, felt he had effective strategies to pass examinations	Language proficiency
Shirley	Thai	French	English teaching	22	Female	Studied English formally at school, did degree in French	Recently finished first degree, felt she was a successful learner	Improve career opportunities
James	Chinese	Mathematics	Financial Mathematics	22	Male	Studied English formally at school	Recently finished first degree, felt she was a successful learner	Gain greater discipline knowledge
Max	Chinese	Chemistry	Chemistry	26	Male	Studied English formally at school	In previous three years worked in non-chemistry related area; felt able to meet academic demands	Geographically wider career opportunities
Emily	Japanese	French	English teaching	31	Female	Studied English formally at school, and studied in UK language school for one month ten years ago	Taught English at high school for seven years in home country, felt able to meet academic demands	Intrinsic long term desire to study in the UK
Alice	Japanese	Politics and international relations	English teaching	23	Female	Studied English formally at school; lived in USA for three years as child, later attended summer schools	Recently finished first degree, felt able to meet academic demands	Language proficiency a key motivation
Simon	Taiwanese	Business and engineering	Engineering	26	Male	Studied English formally at school; studied Japanese in Japan for nine months	Already completed Master’s degree at a Taiwanese university, felt able to meet academic demands	Language proficiency and discipline knowledge
Janet	South Korea	Economics	Economics	28	Female	Studied English formally at school	Felt able to meet academic demands	Gain greater discipline knowledge

Table 6.1: Participants’ profile

6.2. Narrative analysis

6.2.1. The case of Emily

To study in the UK had been one of Emily's biggest dreams since she was a teenager in Japan. About ten years ago, when Emily was an undergraduate student, she came to the UK with her classmate to attend an English conversation school for one month. She had a good impression of the UK at that time.

Before Emily came to the UK, she was a qualified teacher and had worked eight years in high schools. In order to realise her dream of studying in the UK, she used up all her savings, sold her car, and quit her job in Japan. Therefore, Emily was highly motivated to make the most use of life in Green University all the year round because she had dreamed of this year for a long time. The reason for Emily to choose Green University was that she had a vague idea that she wanted to work for a publishing company in the future, and one of the main modules in the course suited her.

Emily liked travelling and had travelled to many countries before coming to the UK. She had been to "*Australia, 2 weeks, US for one week, Italy five weeks, Paris one week, Taiwan and Hungary*" (from Emily's last round interview, paragraphs 787-793).

Emily thought that her overseas' travelling experience helped her considerably with her study in the UK, though travelling was quite different from academic studies. She said:

“Because when I travel, I just know the city of arrival, just have a taste of that country, but now I can tell that I know much about this country, more than when I was here ten years ago” (Emily last round interview, paragraphs 805-807).

Before Emily came to the UK, she had expected an easy life as she had had in a Japanese university. She expected that she would have a lot of time for travelling, and for socialising, been able to speak excellent English after her Master's degree and be able to study theory in the English language teaching field in the UK. Also, she was expecting that she could make friends with many native speakers. So acting in accordance with guidance in the university booklet she prepared enough money for her social life in the year.

When Emily was teaching in Japan, there were many English or American people working in her school, so she had many opportunities to get access to native English speakers at that time. However, as Emily said, the English people she met in Japan were different from the English people she met in England.

“The role is different. Before that they (English people) are foreigners, but now you are a foreigner, so now your role has changed...But that is simple conversation, no deep conversation in terms of the topic. Also they are already in Japan so sometimes I have to explain about my culture, they have never been to Japan...” (from Emily's last round interview, paragraph 136-138).

Emily voluntarily attended a *pre-sessional English language course*, and found this a good orientation to stay in Green University, and built up some confidence in language learning.

Like most of the other students, she spent a long time learning English at the pre-sessional course, as it was her main subject. She had been introduced to necessary English study skills and had much useful feedback from her tutors after doing exercises.

When she started her *Master's courses*, she found accommodation on campus. Emily mentioned many times that she was lucky because she had good flatmates. It was a mixed sex flat and each of them was from a different part of the world. In the flat, the only medium of communication was English. Across the year they were getting along very well, and they were "*just like a friendly big family*". Each day Emily could have at least half an hour to talk with her flatmates in their shared kitchen or sitting room. The topic could be everything that they were interested in. Emily said three of her flatmates' first language was English and one majored in English literature, and all of her flatmates had a good command of English so at first it was very difficult for her to contribute to her flatmates' discussion. She said at first she could not follow her flatmates' spoken English as she was short of vocabulary, so she was not confident to talk. Also, she had problems in using the vocabulary in the proper context. Though she had acquired a good vocabulary, which she knew by heart, she did not know how to use it in the right situation. Fortunately there was a flatmate who majored in Master's Business Administration who

played the role of 'talking facilitator'. After some weeks, Emily had opportunities to use her poor English. Talking with her flatmates was a great help in learning how to use her vocabulary appropriately.

Emily's deficit in English stimulated her motivation. Every time after she finished the meeting with her flatmates she went to her study room and looked words up in dictionaries. Sometimes she had to ask her flatmates to slow down and then she could have a chance to write new words on paper. Emily had a TV in her room. She sometimes watched TV to check what was happening in the world, though she could not fully understand. Emily used TV, film and radio as a model of daily vocabulary, phrases and expressions. She seldom bought a newspaper as she could read news online. As she loved the informal chatting with her flatmates in the sitting room, she read the news online regularly or watched the TV to acquire a new topic for discussion (she read news in Japanese most of the time). Steadily Emily could contribute to her flatmates' conversation.

In term one Emily also had problems with her assignments because she read slowly so she always finished her assignments in a rush. As she said:

"In the first term I spend a lot of time on reading, but still didn't understand, so it took much time for me to digest them." (Emily second round interview, section 0, paragraph 28). She had no time to ask people to proofread her work though she really wanted someone to.

In term one though Emily's social life was not as colourful as she expected, she still found time to go to pubs and parties. She liked dressing up and being beautiful at parties. During the Christmas vacation she travelled to Italy.

In addition to her flatmates, Emily learned a lot from her course peers. *In term two* she had a team mate who was sharing a project with her. This team mate was from Hong Kong and had a wide English vocabulary. Emily described her as a "mobile dictionary" because whenever Emily felt short of vocabulary her team mate could always help her. Emily said she always admired people who had a wide vocabulary. Doing the project in a team also encouraged Emily to learn the ways to express her meaning without causing offence. She found it was important because without knowing that strategy she would never have been able to cooperate with her course mate well. She stated

"I really want to avoid arguing during the project; it is just a waste of time, so I tried to be polite in English." (Emily second round interview)

"so while I was thinking, it took a long time this time. But I think that's why I could understand what I was writing by myself. So my grade was getting higher." (Emily second round interview, paragraph 150-152).

Emily was happy to see improvement in her writing and reading.

In term two, benefiting from writing assignments and reading feedback from tutors Emily started to realise the difference between English writing and Japanese writing. She stated:

“Japanese writing and English writing have a different writing style: Japanese style is indirect and guessing, but English writing prefers a direct way; actually I think this way is better for understanding” (Emily second round interview).

She realised what the difference was after she received a lower grade than she expected. Emily felt that English assignment writing was the most demanding part of her Master’s course of study in the year because she had to write a large amount of academic writing in a short time.

In the Easter vacation Emily went back to Japan with the intention of looking for a job. She stayed in Japan for four weeks but she found that her Master’s degree from England did not give her the competitive edge she had assumed before. It was hard for her to find a job where she could use all the knowledge she learned from her Master’s course with a reasonable salary. Instead of finding a job she bought a new laptop in Japan because she wanted to watch films from her computer. Also she was afraid that her old computer would crash before she finished her dissertation.

The job hunting delayed Emily’s assignment progress so after she came back from Japan she asked for an extension to hand in her assignment. Later she had four weeks extension, exactly the time that she “wasted” in Japan.

From the third term onwards, until the end of the year, Emily was busy doing assignments, looking for jobs and doing her dissertation. She had more worries about her future and study at this time.

By this time, Emily could talk freely with her flatmates in English. She was satisfied with her improvement. Looking back, Emily said that she was very lucky to meet so many nice flatmates in her year because she really learned much. She felt that her money was well spent in England because she could never have had this kind of experience if she had stayed in Japan.

Emily also appreciated the student- centred teaching style in her department, and appreciated the informal friendly relationship with tutors. For example, Emily told me that her dissertation supervisor invited her and other students to a house and cooked for them. They sat down together and had chatted like friends. In her opinion, this kind of thing was impossible in Japan.

After graduation, Emily would have preferred to stay in England for a little more time, so she could develop more of her English. However, because of visa issues, she flew back to Japan shortly after she submitted her dissertation.

Several months later Emily found a job in Tokyo. In her email in June, she told me the following:

“I'm living and working in Tokyo. I got a job, which involves designing English learning materials for e-learning courses in March. I was hired as a material designer which I really wish to get as my career. But, around mid-April, my boss told me to be engaged with coordinating the e-learning course, such as organising students' data or check if students pay tuition fee or not and so on. This is absolutely

not what I am supposed to do with my Master's degree, so I decided to leave the work.

Actually I'm leaving this Friday and start a new job from mid July.

The new job is to design curricula and materials for business English course. The pay seems to be much much more attractive than my current job, which is really good, cause I'm unbelievably poor... I donated all my money to Green University!' " (Email from Emily, 20/06/2006).

In general, Emily enjoyed her time in the UK, though her Master's course was very demanding and she had problems at different stages in her course, and she did not have as much energy and time as she expected to socialize with native speakers. Emily was pleased with her heavy workload because this made her feel that she had not wasted her tuition fee. In her spare time, Emily enjoyed social life and she went to pubs and parties if she could manage the time. Emily said she could sing beautiful English songs, which was confirmed by me and other students in parties. Also, she liked sports and always played basketball with Asian young men.

In England Emily gained more confidence and developed her independence which she appreciated greatly. As she said

"in England I developed my independent thinking skills which I did not expect to learn before".

She observed that this kind of change did not come in one day. Rather she gained this independence through contact with a different academic culture. If

she had stayed in Japan she would not have had done so. She also felt that the chance to get to know different people from all over the world enriched her personality because she had to develop her cross-cultural competence. Sometimes she had to change in order to communicate with people from other cultures. Furthermore, Emily said that the more she learnt, the more she felt confident.

“I can tell I feel more confident before I came here. I finish my degree course, a very demanding course; on that point I can tell that I am much more confident people.”
(from Emily last round interview, paragraph 833-835).

When asking about the experience with new technology Emily told me that she had confidence in ICT and relied on it in her daily life. She used the internet to do things such as exchanging information through email or online instant chatting system, reading news online in Japanese, and online shopping.

She called her mother once a month and her mother always talked about Korean soap opera. When Emily was in England, she had never been to church. Some of her friends invited her to church at Christmas but she declined because she thought her social life was colourful enough.

6.2.2. The case of Janet

As seen by her friends, Janet was a quiet Korean lady. She told me that she was “born to be quiet” and never liked to communicate with people. There was no further indication of where this personality trait came from, but it was

clear that it was deeply rooted within her and she felt it was relatively non-problematic.

Janet mentioned that when she was doing undergraduate study in her home country, she went to an English cram school to improve her English. She did not like the cram school at first because it was too intensive and she needed to do much pair work; however, after she finished the course she found it had been helpful in enhancing her English skills.

Janet did not talk much about her expectation of her overseas' study to other people, nevertheless she mentioned once that she wanted to do a doctoral study after her Master's course.

Like most of the other students, Janet enjoyed the *pre-sessional course* and kept in touch with friends she met at that time. Janet said the *pre-sessional English course phase one* was helpful for her because the tutor taught her how to write instructions, how to write body parts which she could not do well before. However in her opinion the second phase of the pre-sessional course was not that interesting. The tutors talked a lot about economic issues which were "too serious" for her.

Janet said that she liked reading newspapers very much, and used it as a way to improve her reading skill and her vocabulary. She said she always tried to write down the unknown words in her own vocabulary notebook and tried to memorise them later. At some stage she would like to write a kind of summary,

to summarise the article. She liked this way to improve her English because she did not like to talk with people.

Similarly to James and Max, Janet was allocated to the most expensive but most comfortable accommodation on campus. Unlike Max she did not manage to find off-campus cheaper accommodation before she finished the pre-sessional course. She was afraid that she would have no place to stay after term time started, so she reluctantly accepted the offer from the university accommodation office. But she asked all of her friends to keep her informed of suitable off campus accommodation. The fees were a main concern for Janet because they were much higher than her budget. Because Janet had to spend more money on accommodation than she had planned, she had to save money in other aspects, such as food and travelling to make ends meet.

Janet said she had difficulties in having conversations with people in English when she first came to the UK, though she was not motivated to talk much even in her first language.

It took Janet some time to settle down at Green University and to get used to the environment and people. After three months she found she liked the British way of life. She described the English life style as “*everything has been delayed*” which means English people do everything in a peaceful but slow way (comparing the life Janet had in the UK with the daily life in Korea). She also enjoyed more private space in the UK. In her opinion English people

were not as close as people in Korea, as they would not bother to know your personal affairs if you did not want them to. She was happy with this and thought she was in a better situation because she “*was born not liking talking*” (Janet first round interview).

After half a year, Janet thought she had improved a little in her English, but not that much. “*Yeah, I think my written English is a bit improved. But I am not satisfied with the improvement. I really want more and more. A bit, yeah.*” (from Janet first round interview, paragraphs 15-17).

In term one Janet was suffering as a result of difficulties in completing her examinations and assignments. She started to like her flat so her motivation to move out was not as strong as before. In fact she stayed in the same room for ten months before she moved to the nearby city centre in the summer vacation.

Janet did not have much contact with her flatmates. As an *introverted person* she preferred to stay in her room and did writing, calculating and reading alone.

At the end of the first term Janet received the result of her first examination and she found she had failed it. She was very upset, scared of failure, and returned to her study room. She worked hard practising model answers, doing exercises, and learning by heart. She was frightened by the failure from her

first examination because it was too bad. She stayed in her study room and worked harder.

In the first term Janet had been given feedback by her tutor, which she regarded as useful, but she thought that practising by herself was much more important.

Janet did not have a personal computer when she first came to the UK because she never liked computers. She used computers only to do certain things, such as checking emails and listening to music. She did not like to browse the internet though she knew it might be helpful for her study. Janet did not have access to the TV when she was in Green University, therefore she did not watch TV either. In the second term she bought a laptop because, firstly, her tutor did not like her work to be in a handwritten version; secondly, her accommodation was far away from the university computer centre. After she bought a computer, besides doing her academic work, she downloaded the latest movies online and watched them from her PC. Sometimes she could even watch three movies per day. But for her the first purpose of watching movies was recreation and relaxing. Improving English listening was not her intention. Unlike most of the other students in this research Janet preferred to read the paper version of newspapers and books rather than reading them online even though she had to pay extra. She also installed an online dictionary. Nevertheless she did not think that a computer or any software could help her English writing. For Janet, to practise by herself was the best way to improve her writing.

The second term life was full of anxiety for Janet because she failed in several examinations and had to re-sit. Unlike Max or Shirley who also failed in some of their modules, Janet did not turn to her tutors or friends for help. She relied only on herself and worked harder than before because she regarded study as a student's own business so there was no need to talk with others about her problem (from Janet second round interview). Janet said she was always very independent so when she had problems she preferred to solve them by herself rather than asking, because she was not sure whether others would help if she asked. This had been her stance since studying in Korea. She said it was because of her personality that she did not like to communicate with people, not because of cultural differences.

In the second interview, Janet told me that her learning style was fine, so she did not see any reason to change in the new environment. On the other hand, she also found that assessment results were very disappointing.

Janet said that she enjoyed her lectures, and she did not have any problems in taking examinations, but this did not explain why the examination results were disappointing. She did not think she had problems in English. On the other hand, on another occasion, she told me that when she was taking examinations she knew the answers in Korean, but she did not know how to express her ideas in English. As she said:

"I just want to pass, but in the general examinations I for the first time to take examinations in English, it is quite depress(ing), (I) get pressure, I just told I was too worried to do something; I just stayed in my room, just reading, just writing, just

calculation, it was quite important." (Janet second round interview, paragraphs 235-237).

Janet also said that her department had put past examination papers online, but answers were not available. Janet tried to ask her colleagues about model answers but nobody could explain. In the end Janet still did not know what a model answer would look like.

When Janet felt pressure from examinations, she stopped reading newspapers and just concentrated on her economics study. In this term she had tried to speak more, but again she said because of her personality she made only a limited effort.

Other Korean students in the year did not think that Janet had many friends because she preferred to stay in her room and work on her own. Most of the friends she had in the year were Korean students she met in the Korean society, or Asian students she met at the pre-session course. Amongst the limited number of her friends, Janet noticed that their spoken English improved more quickly than hers. She said it was because she did not do presentations and group work on her course so she did not have a chance to practise. Because she did not need to write assignments, she did not feel the pressure of academic writing. She thought it was part of the reason that her academic writing was still poor. She said the environment did not give her any push.

Janet was not sure whether she was satisfied with her English improvement or not because she could not find any criteria to judge. She said she could understand the lectures better than she could in the first term, and she could write more quickly but she was not sure about the quality.

The *third term* was tougher for Janet because she still did not pass some of the modules after she redid the tests. The last time when I met her she told me that she had to wait and see whether she was allowed to do her dissertation. Then she moved to the nearby city centre and stayed with her old Korean friends. I have not had a chance to see her again since then. Some of the Korean students told me that she could not get her degree in the year because she did not pass all her modules. They also said that she did not want to stay in the university because she did not want people to know of her failure.

In general Janet expressed her wish to develop her English ability, and tried strategies to improve, but because of the way her subject was taught she did not put improving English as her priority. By listening to our interview tapes again, I found that Janet had not improved her spoken English by the last time I interviewed her. Actually I found it was very hard to understand her all the time. I wrote in my diary the following:

"It is really very difficult to understand Janet's spoken English. She has a very strong Korean accent, and always uses strange vocabulary which appears only in old textbooks....you need to be very careful and have great patience to understand her..."

(20/07/2004, research diary)

6.2.3. The case of Max

Max's first degree was in chemistry, but he worked as an English teacher and agency officer in different places in China for three years after he got his BA degree, so he said he had almost forgotten chemistry before he started his Master's course.

Max attended the *pre-sessional course* and enjoyed the time there. Unlike many other students, he enjoyed the food in the university pre-paid canteen and put on weight during the pre-sessional course time. Max did not experience severe difficulties in listening to English when he first came to the UK. Everyday exposure improved his listening.

Max felt that since he paid high fees he had to work harder than local students if he did not want to waste money. So he spent a long time on learning English, and followed teachers' instructions.

Max had a tough time in the *first term* because he could not keep up with the lectures in the class. The theory of chemistry was hard for Max because he had learned it in Chinese. There were several hundred chemistry words which were barriers for Max at the beginning, and he had to overcome them. Also he needed to learn much new subject knowledge, such as biology which related to his M.Sc course in English. Besides he needed to read much material and adapt to the new English way of assessment, such as oral examinations, paper examinations and laboratory work. At first Max could not keep pace

with his tutor's delivery, so he addressed this difficulty by working hard and extensive reading.

Cooking was also a problem for Max, though after one month he got used to his own cooking and did not feel hungry. However, he was not fond of his cooking all the time. Before he went to university in China his parents cooked for him. Later he either had meals in the canteen or ate out with friends when his parents were not with him. In China it was never a problem to find cheap and satisfying food. In the UK the situation was different. To eat out everyday was not practical because of cost. Within half a year, he lost 15 kg. Max was glad to lose weight because he thought that was healthier. Max said when he was in China, for the purpose of building up business relationships he had to eat out very often, and most of the time he had to have more food and drink than he really needed so he had become overweight.

Because Max had three years experience of working, he could understand deeply the "value of money". Though his family could fully support him financially while he was in England, he still wanted to do a part time job to share the burden with his parents. His part time job was to clean the classroom between 7am and 9 am from Monday to Friday during term time. In order to undertake the duties, Max had to get up before 6:30am every day.

Max was the only one among the eight case study students who was living off campus. At the end of July he got an offer from the university accommodation office, but it was in the most expensive residence, so Max declined the offer

and tried to look for off-campus accommodation. He learnt from a friend's friend that one room became available in September, so he got in touch with them and signed a contract. Max's accommodation was just about three minutes walk to the main shopping centre, and 10-15 minutes walk to the university central campus. Most importantly, the house was cheaper than university owned accommodation, but the room was much bigger. Max said he could not stand small rooms. His house mates were two females and one male student who were doing undergraduate study in the university. Max got along well with them though they did not have much chance to see him. This was partly because of Max's attitude: he thought those undergraduates were too young so it was hard to find a common topic. Secondly his time schedule was different from his house mates' so it was hard to meet in the house. Normally Max went out before 7 o'clock in the morning and went back for lunch at noon, with a short nap after lunch, and then he went to the library or departmental lab until 1am. His housemates were in the university in the daytime. When Max came back after midnight, all the house mates were already in bed. The only time he could meet his housemates was at weekends, and they could chat for a while. In the house each person shared the fees to buy cleaning equipment, such as a mop and washing up liquid. There was a co-operative spirit in the house, for instance all those in the house cleaned the kitchen after every use. This resulted in the atmosphere in the house being very friendly.

In the *Christmas* break Max had parties with other Chinese students, and played cards. For the rest of the vacation he was preparing for the examinations which would happen at the beginning of the following term.

Max got along well with the European classmates in his class. On the same course there were about 20 to 30 students, of whom more than half were English students, while the rest were made up of a few Chinese, Indian and Pakistani. Normally when doing lab work or team work, Max preferred to work with European classmates because he thought Chinese people had the same thinking style so he could not learn anything new from them.

Max said he relied on new technology greatly. He mentioned that he liked to dictate models of English examples from internet, CD, or TV for imitating. He used imitating for improving his listening, speaking and writing English. He also used MP3 to study English and to listen to music both in Chinese and English. Writing a web blog in Chinese was also a hobby for Max.

Max also used an online dictionary to help with his academic writing and learned more specific vocabulary. He said an online dictionary was more powerful compared with a paper version as it contained many different kinds of dictionary. He said the pocket size e-dictionary was useless for him as the vocabulary was not big enough and subject-related vocabulary needed a special dictionary. Max used different computer software to help with his course study.

From term two onwards, Max felt the pressure of his academic study, so he gave priority to it, and did not spend any extra time on English study because he felt that he needed to graduate first. However, he improved some aspects of English through everyday activity. Because he did not want to waste time, he improved his reading by skimming and scanning. He read newspapers briefly just for acquiring general ideas. He improved his writing by writing clear and logical experiment reports. Max thought that the requirement for academic writing varied between science and social sciences/humanities subject. He said that in science, experiment and formula may take more weight. So in science the priority was to explain the idea clearly. For instance Max said his tutor just wanted to know whether he had explained his ideas clearly, but did not care much about the English language.

In this term Max had many examinations which put him under pressure. He failed one of the examinations and had to prepare for the re-sit which was to prove successful, so he did not have any rest during the Easter vacation. Max said in his department most of the Asian classmates had to re-sit one or two modules and one Asian student even had to repeat the course in the following year, so he *"was not the worst one"*. Max said that foreign students needed to work harder to make up for their deficit in English; and to learn the different thinking style and examination styles in the department. On the other hand, English students had an advantage in language and academic culture, but they would also fail if they did not work hard. He said some of his English classmates had to re-sit in the examinations as well.

Max said after he failed in one of the examinations, he panicked, so he tried to use all the methods (learning strategies) that he could think of to help himself. By asking friends and asking course mates and tutors he had learned that he had to change his way of thinking and learning. He had also learned that he could ask the tutor, to see what she/he was expecting. Max mentioned:

“At the exam, I did not think I need to answer so many details so I just gave the key point that would be enough. But actually I misunderstood it; the teacher wanted as many as possible details to proof you have studied so many things. If you can answer all the details that mean you have studied very hard and read lots of materials. And she will give you high mark” (Max second round interview).

Max also realised the importance of private study in the UK because the tutor only introduced key points in class, and students needed to read intensively after that.

In the second term Max had been to pubs with his English classmates twice, but he did not like them. Firstly, it was because of language problems: when talking about daily life, rather than academic subjects, English students tended to talk very quickly, so Max could not keep up with them. He felt embarrassed and bored when he could not take part in the conversation. Also Max did not like any alcoholic drink so when in a pub he would just take cola or orange juice. The pub experience was not enjoyable for Max especially when it was noisy. However, he got along well with his English classmates and they were still in touch after graduation.

In the second round interview Max told me that he thought that, in general, his course was well designed, but some of the modules were not suitable for people who did not want to continue in the academic area because they were too theoretical.

In this term Max mentioned that proofreading was a useful way to improve writing. He used some software to help with his study, and had accessed past examination papers online.

Max said that he thought that one of the tutors discriminated against Asian students, though he felt that the discrimination was not severe. However, Asian students failed disproportionately on this course. Yet he could not be sure of this and he could not provide the evidence. In the event he worked very hard and resat the examination and passed it, but he still held the view that there was an element of racial discrimination on the part of this tutor.

From the third term onwards, as Max described it, his life carried on in the same fashion as the second term. His time was allocated between doing a part time job, attending lectures, doing lab work, writing assignments and writing reports. During the whole year he was anxious because he was worried about his future, as he was not sure what he would do after graduation.

Max said he liked listening to music when he was in a bad mood, and he also used internet to communicate with other people. However, since his parents

were not good at computer use, Max had to call them with a normal phone. He found that the constraint of using the internet was that you needed skills and access to broadband, which would be unavailable for his parents.

Max said he wanted to stay longer in England to get familiar with English culture and living habits and to improve his English. On the other hand, he also indicated that he would go back to China if he could not find a suitable job, or could not do a Ph.D.

Three months after my last interview, Max found a job in HSBC in the UK as a customer adviser, and he was planning to work there for at least one year.

In general, Max was highly motivated and worked hard in the year because he did not want to waste his parents' money so he tried to make the most use of his time. Max had never been abroad before. For him, it was a wise decision to do overseas study, because he thought he really made good progress in the year, he had worked hard, he passed his courses, he had learnt a lot of English. However, he was aware that there were students who had had higher marks than he had, and he was not one of the top students. For Max, his Master's course was a challenge because he had not touched chemistry for a long time. He was pleased that he passed all his assignments and examinations, and made many friends. He said all the subjects were difficult, every year in the department there were students who failed.

From his course he learned that the most important thing was to know the "thinking way" in the UK. He was satisfied that he became more mature, and

became more open-minded. But on the other hand, he also indicated that he might not choose UK if he could be given another chance because everything in the UK was so expensive and it was not easy to find a job in the UK after graduation.

When Max came to the UK, he thought his spoken English was “OK”, at least at a functional level. After one year, he found that his speaking was still a problem. In speaking, while he knew the rules he could not apply them, which may have been because of second language interference. For example, in his first language, Mandarin Chinese, the past or future tense is expressed by time-related phrases such as “yesterday” or “tomorrow” rather than a verb tense change, so when he was speaking English he always forgot to change the verb tense though he knew the rules very well. When he spent a long time considering the grammar he lost fluency in speaking. And sometimes he could not find the word to describe what he wanted to say. So he thought he made some progress in speaking, but it was slow. Nevertheless he was satisfied with his English improvement in reading, listening and writing. And he learned much specific vocabulary.

Max said he had pressure from his family that he needed to get married, but he just ignored this.

6.3. Summary

In this chapter firstly I presented a profile of the eight students who attended interviews in my study. And then I made narrative accounts for three

participants whose experiences were more typical to classify. In the next chapter I will illustrate the other five students' cases which were more complicated to categorise.

Chapter 7 Interview and research diary findings (2)

7.1. Introduction

This chapter is an extension of chapter 6. In this chapter, I will continue the narrative analysis of my interview participants. Compared with the narrative analysis in chapter 6, the cases in this chapter represented more unstable patterns of participation.

7.2. Narrative analysis

7.2.1. The case of Paul

From the other pre-sessional English course students' point of view, Paul had a typical Chinese face; therefore many people thought that he was from China though he could not speak any Chinese. Paul said his parents were from China and they emigrated to Thailand when they were young. As I learnt from Paul, his parents loved him very much so he had more freedom than other children who were the same age as him.

When Paul was 12 years old, he came to England for a month's English summer course. However, Paul could not remember the details of the summer because without giving a clear reason, he said he did not like learning English all the time.

Paul said that in Thailand teaching was for the main purpose of passing exams. The way of English teaching in Paul's high school was a traditional grammar-translation method. Under this kind of guidance, Paul was good at

doing exams, but poor in speaking English and real life skills (from Paul's second round interview).

Paul told me that he always made trouble in the classroom and he seldom did homework, so he was a headache for his teachers in school. However, because he knew the examination skills he could pass examinations successfully. With successful examination strategies, Paul had IELTS 7 before he took the pre-sessional English course though Paul said his "real" English level was much lower than the language score. That was the reason that he volunteered to go to the pre-sessional English course because he was worried he might not understand the lectures when he entered his Master's course in the Business School.

After gaining a BA degree in engineering in a high-profile university in Thailand, Paul worked for two years in Thailand as an engineer. Before he came to the UK Paul was expecting to have a good grade from his Master's course so he could find a better job after returning to Thailand. Also, he wanted to be able to speak good English after staying in England for one year. Paul told me that the reason he choose England to do his Master's course was that it would take him only a year to get his degree which was much shorter than in most of the other countries.

Paul enjoyed the *pre-sessional course time*, though he complained many times about the English food when he was having meals in the pre-paid restaurant. His preference was spicy Thai food. Like many other Asian

students, he ate everything that was available in the restaurant but complained frequently.

In his spare time, Paul liked to download movies from the internet and felt it was the easiest way to improve his English. He was also keen on doing sports and watching football games in English. From looking at Longman's dictionary CD Rom and the BBC website he had an idea of real English use; also his pronunciation was that of British English. Paul tried to do games on the BBC Learning English website several times at this time, but he gave up as he did not find courses which could suit his level. He wrote web blogs in Thai to get in touch with friends in Thailand. Paul also used instant online chatting with his friends, sometimes in English sometimes in Thai. He said he liked this way of communication as it was informal, flexible and free.

Having a fairly strong level in vocabulary, grammar and listening English before coming to the UK, Paul did not find much difficulty in reading and listening to English. He improved his academic writing through practice. He said that at first he did not know how to put his ideas over in a logical way, so he wrote the first point, second point, and then jumped to fourth or fifth point, which confused his reader, and as a result his writing was regarded as poor. He was able to learn from his tutor's comments and knew that he needed to write in a more systematic way.

After he finished the pre-sessional English course, the focus of Paul's life changed and he did not put any priority on learning English because he thought his subject study was more important.

In term one Paul met some challenges in his course. He said:

"I knew a little fundamental knowledge in this area (finance) but lecturers taught the advance-level of finance" (Paul first round interview).

When Paul had problems in the course he went to the course lecturer for help. When I asked Paul whether he had met his personal tutor in the year Paul told me he had never seen his personal tutor because *"I don't have business with him"* (Paul last round interview).

The other challenge was from university accommodation. The heater in Paul's room had been out of order since he moved in. He reported this to the residence tutor in his block shortly after he found the problem. However for some reason the heater was never repaired. Fortunately Paul bought a radiator at a second hand market so he could keep himself warm all the time.

Paul's flat was mixed gender, and the people were from India, Britain, China, Arab countries, Thailand and Taiwan. The male students who shared the bathroom with Paul were also from Thailand, and they became good friends shortly after they first met as they could speak Thai with each other. Paul talked with his other flatmates only when they met in the kitchen. However, when he had problems his flatmates helped him. For example, he discussed

with one flatmate many times about micro and macroeconomics; and another flatmate helped him to proofread his writing. At the beginning of the course Paul bought some CDs but he did not have chance to watch them because he was too busy.

Food was a problem after Paul finished the pre-sessional course because he found it was too expensive to have meals in the university restaurant every day. On the pre-sessional course, students were given pre-paid tickets. He had to cook for himself most of the time. At first Paul did not know how to cook so he lost a lot of weight though he was already slimmer than most of the other students. After one month he learned some basic cooking but he started to miss the meals at the pre-sessional course time.

Being a sports lover, Paul joined the university sports centre gym and visited there often. He regarded gym as a good way of relaxing and socialising. He was good at almost all the sports so he could enjoy himself and strengthen his body at the same time. He went to play badminton with his Thai flatmate every weekend. He also enrolled with three clubs in the students' union *in term one*. However he never turned up at those societies because he could not find time. *In term one*, Paul also joined the university's Thai society and engaged in some activities there.

Paul said at first he was very uncertain of what to wear to classes, how to address lecturers, how to interact with campus staff. His strategy was to observe:

“if I don’t know how to do something, the best way (is) to do like the British. I have to observe them....like what time do they get to class, what phrases do they use, where do they go during the day....I try to follow from this but combine this with my own way of doing things” (Paul second round interview).

In the second term the demands of subject studies were heavy, so most of the time Paul had to stay in the library, or write projects in his study room. The opportunities to improve his spoken English were very limited. Paul mentioned that sometimes the only person he could speak English with was the cleaning lady in the university accommodation. There was a TV in his kitchen so he could watch TV while he was having meals. His listening comprehension improved gradually when he tried to understand the programmes, though his priority was recreation. But he rarely read newspapers since he was busy with study.

In this term Paul had many examinations. Paul had taken advantage of reading past years’ examination papers online, which helped him to get familiar with the English examination system. However, he also found that, compared with other departments, his department did not explain clearly in writing how to deal with the examination paper, so he could only answer questions according to his original style. Paul did not do well in his first examination. His answers were too simplistic particularly to more discursive questions. After receiving a low grade, Paul tried to find out the way to improve. He found that the academic culture is different in England from that in Thailand. He stated:

“Because I think it is different between my country and this one (England). In my country if student can show the right answer, that's ok for the score. But after I have the score, I am not satisfied with this, and lot of students not satisfied with the result. And they asked the lecture, and lecture told them that you have to show how to, you have to explain the answer, the way to get the answer to me. Like you teach me when I read your answer I must understand what you teach, not just only the answer.” (Paul second round interview).

After knowing what the teacher wanted in examinations, Paul changed his way of answering and improved his grade. He tried to explain each step of his thinking in keeping with the tutors' expectations. After several months, Paul told me that in the second term overall his grade was between 60 and 70, which was average.

In the second term, Paul also found the importance of examination skills. His opinion was:

“If you want to survive, you have to prepare many many aspects, you have to. If you don't know the exam skill, you have to ask someone; if you don't know about the topic, someone in the class, then ask someone, if you don't know the exam skill, you have the past exam paper, if you don't understand, and you don't ask anyone, then you should fail” (Paul second round interview).

After the busy study, Paul took a break during the *Easter vacation*. He went to Prague in the Czech Republic with four other Thai students in the university. That was the only trip he took outside the UK. He thought that trip was good.

Within UK, he had been to many places, such as Leamington Spa, Worcester, Oxford and Cambridge, London, Scotland, Wales (Cardiff and Swansea), Manchester, Liverpool, Bournemouth. He enjoyed all of them.

In the third term and summer vacation, Paul was busy with his assignments and dissertation. He missed his family and his girl friend intensely so he flew back to Thailand shortly after he submitted his dissertation. It was two weeks earlier than the university's deadline.

Three months after Paul graduated from Green University, he sent me an email and told me that he had passed his course with a merit and he was working in a prestigious bank with opportunities in Bangkok.

At the end of his Master's course, when I asked Paul whether he was satisfied with the course or not, he said the course he was doing might be useful for people who wanted to do a Ph.D, because the course provided students with a very solid theoretical background. However, he was expecting that his course would be more practical because he had no intention of doing a Ph.D. Nevertheless, he had more confidence than before because he overcame the language problem and achieved a higher grade than most of his peers. He missed his home in Thailand but resisted the temptation to go back for a visit as it would have been too disruptive to his study. He was proud of his resilience (from Paul third round interview).

Regarding language, Paul said he was not satisfied with his spoken English improvement, because he had improved much less in this aspect than he had expected. Also he thought that the writing skills he had gained at the time of his pre-session course had subsequently decreased after term time started because he had no time to practise. He was not happy to see that. On the other hand Paul also said that though good English might help him get a better score in his assignment, it was not the most important thing. He said his subject was more important. From my observation, I found that Paul could express his meaning fluently in English when he went shopping or chatted with flatmates, but he still had problems when he met an unfamiliar topic. Paul's background was science, and he had used many computer programmes and software before, so he was very confident in using new technologies. On the other hand, Paul thought that computers or any other ICT technology could not help with his English writing, though students might be able to get some ideas from ICT resources.

Financially, Paul said he had a rich aunt who paid all his tuition fees and living fees so he did not have any financial difficulties while he was in England.

Besides study, Paul took part in some "fun activity" such as shopping and having meals in the nearby city centre, going to pubs at the students' union to watch football games and going to the football at a stadium, cooking and drinking beers and whisky. Paul liked parties but he did not have much time to join them. In the year Paul never had any parties with his flatmates. However, because Paul's Thai friends who were staying in other blocks of university

accommodation set up parties every weekend, he joined them ten times in the year. Paul liked to have dinner with his Thai friends at least two to three times per week. At the end of the year Paul could accept food from different countries.

Paul was a Buddhist but he did not practise strictly so he seldom went to the temple in the year.

7.2.2. The case of Alice

Because of her father's work, Alice had many overseas experiences when she was a child. She stayed in the USA from birth to three years old, and then she went back to Japan with her family. Between seven and ten years old she attended primary school in Germany and, according to her mother; she could speak German at that time. However, she could not speak any German now. When she was in junior high school her parents sent her to America for three weeks' home stay, but she could not remember much about that trip. When she was a university student she went to travel in Europe for three weeks.

In the interview Alice told me that her parents were very busy in developing their careers so she had had to cook for her three younger brothers and sisters since she was a high school student. She also needed to share the other housework like washing clothes or cleaning the rooms with her brother and sisters. She was very content to be in England and enjoyed the high quality of life because in England she just needed to cook for herself.

Alice said her motivation in learning English was like a 'wave' before she came to the UK. In her junior high school, Alice was highly motivated and spent a long time on learning English, and then she received high marks. She was praised by her tutors and she liked English more. She was attracted to colourful textbooks full of pictures. However, in senior high school, there were no pictures in textbooks, and the teaching became grammar focused. She did not like this so her grade dropped, and her motivation decreased.

Knowing the importance of English, Alice went to an intensive cram school when she was an undergraduate, and the tutor there asked students to talk, to do much interactive work. She was not happy with that kind of teaching style at the beginning, but gradually she found she learned how to give instructions, how to give ideas so she liked that later.

Before Alice came to England, she did not have any particular hope for her overseas study, but just had some brief plans, such as studying English, studying many useful things, making friends from different countries.

Alice found her way in Green University by making friends who also joined the pre-session English language course. Encouraged by her tutors, Alice spoke English to her Japanese friends at the pre-session English course. During the course she was motivated and learned many study skills which she had never heard of or practised before, for example, skimming and scanning in reading. She did not experience severe difficulties in listening to English when she first came to the UK. From doing a presentation, Alice found that to

rehearse with a tape recorder alone or to rehearse with her classmates or friends were helpful ways to improve her spoken English and reduced the worries.

Like most of the other students, Alice enjoyed the *pre-sessional English course* period and thought that it was her happiest time in that year. The friends she met in the pre-sessional course were “treasures” in her life and she had much support from them in the year.

At the start of *term one*, Alice worked hard to improve her English. She continued to speak English to everybody she met as she knew she was in England and one of her main aims in the UK was to study English. She used many independent learning strategies to improve her English, such as playing English games with a computer, reciting useful phrases from an English text book, trying to attend an in-sessional English course.

Beside compulsory and optional courses, she also chose to attend extra courses in her department. She listened to the radio and used learning materials she had from the pre-sessional course and in-sessional English courses to do private study.

From *term one onwards*, Alice stayed in university accommodation which had a beautiful view outside her window. Her flatmates were international, including many European students. However she felt it was difficult to talk with her Greek flatmates, as their accent was strong, and she felt that she needed

to change her personality while talking. The problem was the same when she was talking with her Portuguese flatmate.

After some weeks' hard work, Alice did not feel she was making progress. Instead she found she had met many frustrations. She was depressed because she could not be outstanding among her classmates; she did not pass one of her assignments and had to rewrite; her spoken English was not as good as most of her classmates. Also, because of her personality, even asking was a problem for her. Alice did not know how to control the depressing feeling which made her start to worry about her future. The only ways for her to get rid of her depression were to go swimming, and read novels (in Japanese).

When I asked Alice whether her personal tutor was aware of her worries, she told me that she had not met her personal tutor after their first meeting because she did not know what she should say.

In term one for Alice the most effective way to help her writing was to get feedback from her tutors. "...*maybe feedback from my tutor is very helpful. That was the most effective support I think.*" (Alice last round interview, paragraph 612-614).

In the second term after getting advice from her friends, Alice learned to lower her expectations and started to enjoy her life more. She realised that she was

not going to make rapid progress in a short time. She started to go outside and enjoyed more social life and spent less time on private study.

Alice said that when she was talking with people from European countries, say Greece, she had to change her way of talking otherwise people would misunderstand her. For example, she needed to say “yes” or “no” first, before expressing her opinion. She said that she also needed to change her personality, to behave more assertively; otherwise her listeners would be confused about her. She was not comfortable with this kind of change so later she just stuck with her Asian friends because she felt communication was more natural and comfortable. Also in her class about 95 percent of the students were non-English, so she did not have so many spontaneous opportunities to get in touch with local students.

She ended up with making friends who were also from Asia, mainly from Japan, and spoke Japanese with her Japanese friends all the time. *In term two* her life circle was limited to Asian, especially Japanese students. She felt that it was easy to make friends with Asian students.

In this term Alice also changed her focus on learning English. She said that while in the UK she should take more advantage of the environment and make more international friends, practising more speaking and listening English rather than just private study. She said she could improve her English grammar, vocabulary and reading after going back to Japan. So she went to pubs with her Japanese friends and to international parties which enriched her

life greatly. She went to watch movies in the university arts centre and student cinema with friends.

After continuously writing assignments, Alice improved her English academic writing skills. She said when writing in English at the pre-sessional course, she had to write in Japanese first, and then translated into English. From *term two* onwards she could write in English directly. Alice said she had benefited from her tutors' comments on her assignment, though in the second term tutors' comments were about structure and content of the course, not like in term one when tutors sometimes corrected her English. Alice received higher grades in her assignment in this term and she was pleased with that. Doing assignments also made Alice realise that in the UK, writing had a much more important place in the assessment system.

From *the third term* onwards Alice's department did not have any lectures. She felt lonely at the beginning because she could not see her classmates and tutors as often as before. Also she was worried about her future when graduation was approaching.

In general, Alice enjoyed her time in the university. Though she did not like the drinking water in the UK and had to buy spring water from the supermarket, it was not a real problem. Unlike most of the other Asian students at the pre-sessional course, Alice did not feel there was much difference in the cost of living between UK and Tokyo. Like most of the other

students, she felt tired after handing in a dissertation, but she recovered soon after.

Nine months later after Alice went back to Japan, she wrote me an email and told me that she was working at a private school as a teacher. She said:

“I don't think I work here for the rest of my life. But I think working here is very precious experience for me. And I want to become a charming super working woman while I'm being here! hehe.” (email from Alice, 28/06/2006).

In general Alice had improved reading and writing in the year because reading and writing was central for writing assignments, which was the main assessment way in her department. However, besides reading reference books, Alice did not read any other English books. Listening was not a problem for Alice at the beginning and she kept on improving in the year. Alice mentioned that from listening, she learnt more ways of expressing meanings, and she knew more phrases, more vocabulary to express meanings (Alice second round interview). Alice was worried about her spoken English at the beginning of the year. At the end of the year she said she was aware of considerable improvement compared to before coming to the UK though she was still not satisfied with her spoken English. Because Alice's major was English language teaching, just communication in English made her pleased with herself, and she enjoyed using new phrases in English conversation. Overall she was satisfied with her English progress because she had tried her best.

She felt that one year in England was too short, because she did not have time to join societies or to make friends who were from a different background. She enjoyed her life in Green University, so she wished she could have another year if possible.

As she said *"I just want one more year, but to disappoint me my year is finished."* (from Alice's last round interview, paragraphs 129-135). She was very pleased that she could submit her assignment on time and get her degree on time, because she worked very hard to achieve this. She was contented with reading novels and making friends. She would want a higher grade if she could do the course again, but she could accept the one she obtained because she had tried her best.

Alice was confident in using new technology in her life. She said her computer was helpful because she could do exercises at the computer, such as note-taking, brainstorming, practising with pronunciation as many times as she liked and so on without talking with people. She said she was an introverted person and did not like to talk so she relied on a computer considerably in her daily life. Her experiences with the computer, included writing a diary with the computer; having blog entries; watching movies online; doing games with the computer and so on. She also had used different types of dictionaries, such as a thesaurus dictionary, an idiom dictionary, and a special subject dictionary at appropriate times. She said that a traditional paper version dictionary and e-dictionary had their distinctive functions.

Alice said that she was satisfied with her choice of subject and university. She also stated that she would like to visit England again if she could be given another chance.

Alice was fully financially supported by her family so she did not do a part time job. However, she still could feel the invisible pressure from her father, who wished that she could study harder and work harder, and become independent.

7.2.3. The case of James

James had just graduated from a prestigious university in China when he started his Master's course. As the only child in his family he knew that his parents would feel lonely when he was far away from home so he rang his parents at least once a week. James said his parents supported him well while he was in England so he had no financial worries and enjoyed his life in the UK very much. James told me his parents were concerned only about his happiness and health, so they never gave him any pressure.

James was highly motivated when he started to learn English in junior high school and he was always among the top students in his class. He said the classrooms in most of the Asian countries are teacher-centred. Also students put more focus on the results, and would be satisfied if they could find the solution to a question. On the other hand, James also felt that high pressure sometimes was a kind of help for study, as he could receive intensive knowledge in a short time.

James had a high expectation about his overseas study and worked hard towards his goal. He expected that a Master's degree from a high ranking university in the UK would be a competitive advantage for his job hunting, and he had planned to find a job and gain several years working experience before doing his Ph.D.

James spent a long time studying English at *pre-sessional time* and achieved a high score. The skills which impressed James most at this period were skimming and scanning in English reading, as he did not know of them before. James had a fairly strong background vocabulary before he came to the UK which was a good foundation for his English improvement.

Like most of the other students, for James the *pre-sessional course time* was the happiest time in the year. He liked the Saturday trips which were organised by the course office. He liked Cadbury Chocolate factory; the little river in Leamington Spa, the French coffee shop; the busy life in the nearby city centre. He also enjoyed the food, friends and peaceful life at that time (from James's blog, originally in Chinese).

When James started his Master's course in the UK, he found that his major subject study was the most important thing for him though he still forced himself to browse the English website to improve his English reading. Also he listened to English programmes from the radio, or the material he downloaded to his MP3 for the purpose of improving listening English.

He mentioned that at beginning, because of his poor English, he could not understand lectures; he could not communicate with people (because he did not know what he was being asked). James mentioned:

"I remember when I arrived at Birmingham at the first time, I can't understand anything....I am (was) very confused, I feel (felt) very confused. And everything I can't understand" (James first round interview, paragraph 734-742).

Gradually, James felt he improved, though not as much as he expected. James also mentioned that his confidence in English varied according to the environment. He said when he had a lecture where the tutor could speak clear and standard English, he was very confident about his English. In contrast, when he met some lecturers who had strong accents and used many slang or abstract words in their speech he lost his confidence in English.

In the first term, James felt that it was difficult for him to write a report in English on his first project. He tried to grab books in the library and imitate the writing format. Step by step, after writing more projects, James felt that he could understand the framework within which these reports were expected to be written. With practice he could do this much quicker than before.

Unlike other students, *from term one on* James was staying in a single sex flat in university accommodation which was not his first choice. He did not like the single sex flat, because he felt it would be "boring". As a young man who was in his early twenties he would have preferred to have female students in the flat. His flatmates were international, American, Indian, mainland Chinese,

English, Thai and Hong Kong Chinese. Like Paul, James did not have much contact with his flatmates, and he only met them in the kitchen and had a few words. James developed a social life with friends from the pre-sessional course or with his classmates. James liked playing football very much. In the year he went to nearby pubs only twice to watch important football matches because he did not have TV in his accommodation.

Besides football, James also liked parties. James said that the department had organised four to five parties in the year where he could meet his course mates and tutors. He claimed that it was very helpful for communicating because generally in the lectures, except group work and presentations, students would not have much chance to meet their tutor or classmates. Every time he went to a party, he had a meal, and chatted with people. The people he talked to most at departmental parties were an Icelfander, a Pakistani British, one Spanish course mate and one English fellow. Sometimes after the party, James went to the nearby city centre with these four people to have dinner and continue talking. Looking back, James said that their talking was limited only to a superficial level, such as the difference between countries, cultural differences, or the history of each person's country. His closest friends were from China.

At Christmas time he went to London and stayed there for four days with four other Chinese friends. He and his Chinese friends were excited when they saw Big Ben and the River Thames. In this trip, from communicating with

other people, James found that his listening and spoken English had improved. He said:

"Take my trip to London for example. I can find the shops or underground way much quicker than before" (James first round interview, paragraphs 734-742).

He also mentioned that he could understand and communicate better with English people in the shops and in the streets.

In James's class, about half were from European countries, and the other half were Asian, including Chinese, Indian, Pakistan and Sri Lankan. In the *first term* James tried to discuss academic questions with European students, but later he found language was a barrier, and the thinking style was different. James said those European students put too much emphasis on discussion for its own sake, and did not feel any urgency in reaching a conclusion. In contrast, Asian students tried to reach a conclusion more quickly, and felt their discussion was more productive and more efficient. Over time language differences became less important, but this different attitude to talk became more important.

Unlike most of the other students, James had problems in his flat because food was always missing in the shared fridge. Other flatmates claimed the same experience. James felt upset about that because this gave him a sense that the flat was not safe. Every day there were students in the flat who lost food in the shared fridge. It disturbed James's calm.

James mentioned that *in the second term* his subject study was more intensive, as he had to attend at least six hours of lectures per day, plus undertaking many assignments, examinations and group work. He still browsed the internet, but most of the time this was with a Chinese website for the purpose of relaxing.

James's department had put the past examination papers and answers online so James did not have problems in understanding the English style of assessment though it was quite different from the Chinese way. James said he liked doing assignments more than doing examinations because he learned more, though he achieved a high score in examinations.

In the second term James lost his mobile phone in his flat's kitchen which made him more disappointed in his flat. In the year they reported thefts to their resident tutor many times. The resident tutor asked students to lock the kitchen every time after using it, and had a meeting six times with all the students in the flat in the year. However food was still missing, so James and his friends suspected that the "thief" was a flat member. Later they found that one of the flatmates never bought any food, and never cooked, so they assumed that he was the "thief", but they could not prove this. James had found that the suspected flatmate used his sauce without his permission, but he did not report it because he thought it was trivial. Nevertheless, James was annoyed about the missing food, and thought having kitchen meetings was a waste of time because they did not work.

In the second term James's group (mostly Chinese) did not discuss questions with students from the West as they continued to find the style of communication difficult. James and his Asian classmates talked with European students in the class only when the tutor asked them to do group discussion. Though study was intensive, James enjoyed his life and still found time to relax with friends. In the *Easter vacation* he went to the Lake District for several days. Also he went to Manchester and other nearby places in the year.

After the Easter vacation until graduation James was busy doing examinations, assignments and dissertations, and worried about his future. He started to send Ph.D. applications to top universities in the UK. He also applied for jobs in the UK. After he was rejected by several banks in London he realised that the outlook did not appear to be as optimistic as he had thought. He also argued that the Master's course he did in the UK was very theoretical, and it was more like the preparation stage for a Ph.D. course, rather than of practical use for the real world of work.

In the third term, James said when he watched movies from his own computer, he felt too tired to listen in English so he selected the English subtitles. He tried to listen to English radio before going to bed but he always felt very sleepy so he did not have much chance to listen.

At the end of his course, when I interviewed James, he was not very sure if, given another chance, he would choose the same country and same

university for a Master's course or not. James said that he was not satisfied with his progress in spoken English but he was more satisfied with his subject learning. For other aspects of language skills, James said he gained his confidence in his vocabulary again and said that reading was never a problem for him; actually reading was his strongest point among his four language skills (James last round interview). In his opinion, though he had had a very nice time in the UK, and learned a lot, the expense was too high. He felt a bit uneasy that his parents had to pay such high fees for him. If he could have chosen a similar course in another place with much lower expenses or could have earned a scholarship, he would have been more satisfied.

From my observation, I found that James's spoken English was better than when he first arrived, but showed no great improvement. Interestingly, by listening to our audio interviews again, I found that James could speak more fluent English in the Easter vacation than at the end of year. When I mentioned this to James, he said he did not realise this. But he said that it was possible because he did more group work with non-Chinese course colleagues during the Easter vacation, but he mainly spoke with Chinese people from the third term onwards. He suggested:

"The problem is I don't have as many opportunities to talk with foreign students as I expected. I am not very satisfied with my English progress. I think I should improve my English more. But until now I have not, which is a pity for me" (James last round interview, paragraph 29-31).

As seen by peers, James was a very careful young man. His personality reflected on his subject choosing and future plan: James chose risk management as his Ph.D. research topic because he was very interested in reducing risk to the lowest level. James said that he did not like to take any risks so his thinking was quite “conservative” compared with people who were of a similar age to him. Furthermore, he did not apply for any universities in USA though he knew he might have better chances there. As he said, he was already familiar with the life style and academic culture in the UK, so he did not want to have any risk of change.

James enjoyed the use of new technology. Though staying in an English speaking country, James still liked to use ICT to improve his speaking and listening English because he felt that everybody had their own business to attend to. As a result of this he could not meet native speakers at any time he wanted, but he could use computers whenever and wherever he liked. James used group chat with his course mates online and discussed their assignments or examinations. He mentioned that when he and his friends found online chatting was not enough, they would make an effort to meet.

Nevertheless James said that computers or any other ICT technology could not help with their English writing, though students might be able to get some ideas from ICT resources. He concluded that to improve one’s English writing students need to use other ways.

One year later, after my last interview with James, he sent me an email and told me that he was going to do his Ph.D. at Oxford University in September 2006.

In his limited spare time, James watched football games or browsed the website relating to football. He told me in this way he improved considerably in reading English. James said his writing English had improved by writing a project report so he could write quicker and clearer English than before.

After one year's study, James became more confident about himself and felt that everything could be done if you paid enough attention to it.

In other people's eyes, James was a hard working student. He said:

"I think hard working is very necessary. Of course my academic performance has confirmed my hard working. Everybody is not stupid, they are always clever, so if somebody put more time on study, they can get better performance" (James last round interview, paragraph 335-337).

7.2.4. The case of Simon

As seen by his peers, Simon was very generous because he was willing to help people all the time when he was in Green University.

Simon's first language is Mandarin Chinese and Japanese is his first foreign language. He studied Japanese in a language school in Japan for nine months before he came to the UK so English is his second foreign language. Simon already had a Master's degree in Taiwan. The reason for Simon to

learn two foreign languages and to do two Master's degrees is that Simon's father is a businessman and he wants Simon to inherit his career so Simon wants to master as many skills as possible. For Simon study and making friends to build up a network were more important than the experience of working as he does not need to worry about finding a job.

Before he came to the UK and Japan, Simon had been to Australia, New Zealand and Singapore but he thought he did not have any deep understanding about them. Simon said he had already got used to being away from home so he did not feel any homesickness in England though sometimes he missed Taiwanese food.

Simon said he liked English very much when he was in junior high school. At that time his teacher gave them a test in every lesson, so he had to study English every day. Because he worked hard, he could get a high score in the English examinations, so he could always get praise which encouraged him to put more time into English study. He was regarded as a successful English learner at that time. As with Alice, after entering senior high school, Simon fell behind other students as he could not find suitable strategies to deal with “*the large quantity of grammar and vocabulary*” (Simon first round interview, paragraph 65) Correspondingly, Simon started to brush up his English when he was in university where he realized its importance.

Before Simon did his Master's course, he was expecting that he would have very good English and gain much subject knowledge and have many international friends by the time he had finished his course.

Simon had a strict teacher in the pre-sessional course and he was taught to write assignments and know the importance of writing references. His tutor also gave him many websites for private study in English. After the pre-sessional course Simon found that he had made progress in his English writing. He indicated:

"...I can't say I improved a lot, but I can write it fluently OK" (Simon first round interview paragraph 79-85).

Simon suffered from a limited vocabulary. He felt that his problem in English had been rooted in his laziness with regard to memorising vocabulary. He consciously tried to address this by memorising new words.

When Simon first came to the UK, he experienced difficulties in spoken English, and he did not have the courage to do a presentation. Later he found that to rehearse with a tape recorder alone or to rehearse with his classmates or friends were helpful ways to improve his spoken English and reduce the worries. He practised that all the time.

Like other students, Simon enjoyed the *pre-sessional course* most of the time though he complained about food every day. When he first arrived in the UK he could not understand why English people had potato every day instead of

rice because his stomach refused to accept English food. He complained to the university restaurant where he had pre-paid meals during the pre-sessional English course. However the restaurant still served potato as the main course. In order to survive Simon gave up and started to eat potato food. Interestingly, he found he loved chips after one year.

After the pre-sessional English course, Simon felt that he did not consciously seek to practise his English any more because of the pressure from his course. Simon said in the first term when listening to English he could not keep up with the speaker, so he often missed the most important point. He found it difficult to pick up meanings in new contexts.

On the other hand, Simon claimed that some of his course tutors were not qualified, and their teaching was not that interesting; together with his English listening problems, this made the course more difficult. Simon asked why he could understand some modules without any problem, but had a problem with other modules? He said the tutors should also share some responsibility because he believed that even if the tutor had explained in Mandarin Chinese he still could not have understood.

In Simon's department, for most courses tutors would give reading materials before lectures. If students read the materials before class, they would understand the main idea of the lecture, which was helpful to understand the whole course. Though the reading materials tended to be overwhelming, Simon admitted that they were still helpful for him.

When Simon was first required to write an 1,000 word assignment in three days, he was nervous because he had never done this before. Then the first 1,500 word assignment was another challenge for him, and the following 3,000 word essay was hard. After writing a large number of English essays, Simon found that he had acquired the ability to write fluent English in a short time, though he might have made grammatical errors. In this process Simon received help from classmates who had a strong background. Simon also mentioned that proofreading was a useful way to improve writing. After he practised his writing, Simon would find someone who could proofread for him otherwise he would make the same mistakes again and again.

From the *first term* on Simon was staying in the most expensive but most comfortable accommodation on campus. Some of Simon's good friends whom he met at the pre-session course also stayed in the same block, and he liked to cook with them when they could find time. There were about three or four Chinese speakers in the cooking team, and they liked to cook in turn. Simon and his friends regarded cooking and having meals together as a good way to reduce loneliness and to save time. Simon was the sort of person who loved food and who liked to explore the art of cooking. For Simon the quality of food was one criterion by which to judge the quality of life. So when he had time he liked to take a bus and train to the nearby city centre to buy meat, fish, fresh vegetables and fruit in the market. He loved this kind of shopping as everything in the city centre was cheaper than in supermarkets around the university, with more choices and better quality. Some specific Oriental foods, such as Tofu and rice noodles were only available in the city centre in the

year 2004/5. The food Simon bought from the city centre could last for at least three weeks because he was a strong young man who could carry heavy bags. Simon said that he spent about 50 percent of his spare time on shopping, cooking and appreciating delicious food.

At *Christmas* time Simon's girl friend, who was studying in Australia, came to England to visit him. He was happy about this but it also made it a busy time as he had to finish his assignment on time and show his girl friend around the UK.

He said English speaking and listening could be improved through the using of ICT. He had downloaded a model of writing from the internet when preparing for tests; he had used online data bases such as "Athens" to read papers which helped his subject study. He also had downloaded voice files from the internet and read them over time to improve his English listening and speaking. He said:

"I can read it again and again. It will help me to get understand. Because if you listen to radio, something just appear once, and then they disappear. But from ICT, yes, you download something, and you can read it again and again, yes." (Simon first round interview, paragraph 196).

Simon liked one kind of online dictionary named "Dr Eye". He said it was very convenient because you could choose different languages and translate the sentence you wanted into the language you chose in five seconds. He used

this translation software as a dictionary as well. Simon had also had experience in using computer software to draw figures for his assignment.

In the second term Simon had many assignments and examinations. He felt that interest was a motivation for learning. For example, *in term two*, he was interested in two modules, so he read many reference books, learned the strategies of seeking information by asking friends and tutors and he also tried to identify the key points and used them in his assignments. He received a high score in the two assignments.

For other modules, about which Simon was not so interested, he might only understand 70% of the course. He made up for this by getting help from friends who knew more in the area, by using group chat with course mates online and discussing the assignments or examinations and by getting models of writing from an online past examination paper database and becoming familiar with the style.

Simon said that financially he had full support from his father so he did not worry about money. However he had pressure that he needed to get his degree and to perform well academically though his parents did not say so. He felt that if he could not get his degree everybody in his family would blame him because he had wasted his father's money. Simon said studying English would produce a long term return for him, but doing English assignments and examinations were a short term goal, because he would know his mark next month. When he was busy with study Simon just put energy into the short

term goal, which became the excuse for not spending extra time on studying English.

In the second term Simon also loved doing presentations because he thought it was a good way for him to improve his spoken English language and subject knowledge. He cooperated well with his team mates and got a prize (a bottle of champagne) after they beat other teams in a competition his tutor had organised on presentation. Simon said his team was thrilled when they received the champagne because they regarded it as an approval of their hard work.

At the Chinese Lunar New Year time (February) Simon went back to Taiwan for two weeks to spend the holiday with his family.

For the *Easter* vacation Simon flew to Australia and stayed there for one month with his girl friend. His father came for one week. It was an important time in his life as he proposed to his girl friend and they agreed to get married. Unlike Paul, Simon did not travel much in the UK because he went to Australia and Taiwan in the year. Looking back Simon felt it was a pity because he would have loved to go to places of interest such as the Lake District and Edinburgh.

Simon was happy with the facilities of his accommodation, but like Max, he did not have much contact time with his housemates as he was always in his friends' flats. When he was staying in his room it was time for doing

assignments or preparing for examinations. Sometimes he drank beer at midnight alone when he was struggling with his assignments. Simon did not like drinking beer before he came to the UK. Every day he talked with his girl friend who was studying in Australia for at least half an hour online. Simon had also used an online chatting system with his sister, but not with his parents because they did not know how to use it. Simon said the advantage of using online chatting system was convenience, and that it was free.

From the *third term* onwards, like Paul, Simon was eager to go back to Taiwan because he missed the food and life style, also his fiancée very much. Like Paul he made every effort to finish his dissertation early. He flew back to Taiwan two weeks earlier than the university deadline.

After getting his assignment feedback, Simon told me that for his subject, writing skills could not improve assessment grades because:

“knowledge in that module and hard work in that module is much more important than your English writing ability” (Simon last round interview).

About one year after our last interview, I met Simon on the instant online chatting system and learned that he got married shortly after he went home, and he was working in a trade department in his father’s company.

In general, Simon was a sociable person *in the year* when he was in Green University. Also because he could speak quite fluent Japanese, he liked to chat and have parties with Japanese students. On Simon’s course about 85

percent were Asian students so the majority of Simon's friends were from Asia. Simon was popular among mainland Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese students.

Simon was highly motivated to study in the year because of the environment. He also thought he had made great progress since he came to the UK and he was more confident than before. He said:

"Yeah, a lot, a lot. I opened my mind I find my view was opened by supervisors"
(Simon second round interview, paragraphs 393-399).

However, Simon also mentioned that his level of confidence varied according to the environment. Most of Simon's best friends were from Asia, except one from Jordan. This Jordanian student turned out to be Simon's only good non-Asian friend in the year. Simon said that when he was talking with that friend he did not feel nervous because they knew each other well. However when he was talking with people from other nationalities he became nervous and his English became poor.

Simon liked his course because he learned many new things from the course. Sometimes he complained about the high pressure of his study and hoped his course would be easier. However he was also happy to see that his father's money was wisely spent and he was making good progress.

Looking back to his Master's course, Simon said that he had made progress in all the areas where he wanted to improve, but at a much lower rate than he

had expected. However he was still very proud of himself because he found that he had learned much more than he did in any other years. For Simon, Green University has a good reputation and good facility, so if given another chance, he would also choose the same university.

7.2.5. The case of Shirley

Shirley, a Thai student, had just received her BA degree from her home country (Thailand) when she started her Master's course in England. Her first degree was in French so English was her second foreign language. Shirley told me her level of French was much higher than her English but I have never had any chance to confirm this. Shirley appeared to her peers as very emotional and changeable. As her friend said, when she was in a good mood she was very charming and open-minded, and could do everything with high efficiency; but if she was gloomy she just stayed in her own room and did not want anybody to bother her. On the other hand, she would feel very upset and annoyed if nobody paid any attention to her. My later contact with Shirley confirmed that she was a very changeable person.

Shirley started to learn English in kindergarten, but only some basic vocabulary. At the university, Shirley went to an intensive language cram school in Thailand. But she was being trained to only speak, not to do presentations. She did not know how to write in an academic style.

Shirley had high expectations about her academic performance. Before coming to England, she was thinking of doing hotel management in Switzerland, but because her background was in education she had to do at

least another year in the subject, which was going to be expensive. In the end she had to give up her original plan and choose a subject which was related to education.

Shirley joined the *pre-sessional course* and enjoyed the first five weeks (Phase I). She rated the tutors in her first phase as “nice” and helpful, and she improved her academic writing. As she said later:

“...at that time (at university in Thailand) even 250 words are too much for me, I can’t write, even how to begin it, and I always like to repeat the question in the paper....” “...but when I came here, right, I know oh, OK, how to write it, the pre-sessional course force me, push me to write a lot, so to write 250 words is so easy for me now” (Shirley first round interview, paragraph 72-76).

She felt confident about her English and her future Master’s course’ study. However this confidence was sapped when she had a new tutor in the second phase of pre-sessional. According to what Shirley said, the new tutor always asked students to do all the work by themselves without any guidance. She just told students that “you are bad”, but students did not know why they were bad. For example, she used to draw a bad face on Shirley’s writing and wrote “poor writing” without any further comments, which hurt Shirley greatly. Shirley argued that if she knew how to write properly, she would not have enrolled for the course. Shirley said mainly because of this tutor, she lost her confidence. Unlike the majority of the other students in this research, positive feedback was very important in Shirley’s life. When she was in Thailand she received much love from her parents, friends and relatives. She also had a boyfriend

who she said loved her very much. She said this made her feel that she was 'a princess' and gave her confidence. However in the UK, far from her family and old friends, she was not treated so royally. Sadly she found she was not as popular as before among boy students either. She was upset to see that. One year later she felt if she had the same tutor throughout the pre-sessional course, she would have been more equipped to deal with the year.

In the first term, Shirley voluntarily attended the in-sessional English language class. She felt it was helpful to improve her specific language skills, such as pronunciation and academic writing. At the beginning when Shirley was not clear what academic writing was, she used the handouts from the pre-sessional and in-sessional classes as her guidance.

In term one Shirley's speaking and listening English had improved greatly. According to what she said, this was just because she wanted to survive. She said that when she was in Thailand, she had also enrolled for an English language cram school, because she wanted to improve her English. She had had experience in watching Satellite TV with English programmes and using computer games to learn French when she was in Thailand. However, she did not persist in doing those because she could live comfortably well without using English in her daily life. When she came to England, the situation changed. She had suffered from her second language English at the beginning and she realised the importance of using English. She was forced to start learning English seriously because everybody around her could speak

good English, She said if you cannot speak or write well you cannot survive.

She stated:

"I think the most important thing for me is environment. Because I agree someone said if you push yourself, or put yourself in the target language environment....if you don't know well, if you can't speak, you can't write well, you can't survive, it is for surviving!" (Shirley first round interview, paragraph 192-194).

She had an agreement with her Thai friends that they must speak in English with each other. She also bought a TV and watched TV every day for the purpose of recreation and learning English. Shirley said that the first thing after getting up every morning was to turn on her computer. She used computer games, an online language learning website, films and radio as a model of vocabulary, phrases and expressions. She used English websites which were recommended by tutors at pre-sessional and in-sessional courses to practise writing skills.

She also forced herself to watch English DVDs, as opposed to Thai DVDs. Shirley felt that since she paid high fees she had to work harder than local students if she did not want to waste money. She said:

"sometimes they (the internet) helped my listening, but for the radio I used too, I used it to practise my listening skill a lot, and also some words, besides academic words, I can get some slang words, and some daily life words from what they say." (Shirley first round interview, paragraphs 248-250).

During the Easter break when she went back to Thailand, sometimes she unconsciously spoke English with her parents and she felt happy to be able to do that.

Shirley was very excited that she could produce proper academic writing in English when I interviewed her in the first term, and she rated highly the teaching quality of her department.

However when she had her first assignment results, she was shocked because she failed in one of the assignments and needed to re-sit. She was so upset that she wanted to withdraw from her course and go home (Thailand) because she had never failed in any of her academic subjects before. Her Thai friends comforted her and gave her many suggestions. From her friends she learned how to face setbacks in study and re-adjusted her expectations.

The first term was mixed with enjoyment, excitement and sadness. Unlike many other students, Shirley did not suffer from food related issues because she was a good cook before she came to the UK. On the contrary, her cooking competence helped her earn a good reputation among students. Others reported her as “a star” at parties which helped her gain confidence at this time. She kept on telling her classmates that doing practical things, such as cooking was her real interest. She dreamed of opening a restaurant in Thailand after she finished her course in England.

In term two, when Shirley was struggling with assignments, her Thai friends taught her research skills and she was able to find references and resources efficiently. She had also learned advanced searching skills from a library leaflet. From writing assignments she developed her reading and writing skills, and could use advanced research method to work more efficiently. Shirley felt her assignments in the second term were a better quality, and indeed she got higher grades, because she could understand more.

Shirley said learning from her mistakes was one of the most effective ways of improving her writing. Step by step she learned the trick of writing. As she stated:

“My teacher gives me the topic, and I start to write an essay and give it back to him. And he will check it and give it back to me. And I looked at every mistake, and found what the problem was. At each point I found a good way or the best way to write it....every time I learned from my mistake.” (Shirley second round interview).

Most of Shirley's good friends were Thai. Though she could speak fluent French she did not make many French friends in the year. Shirley preferred to stay with Thai or other Asian friends because she felt more comfortable. Her boy friend was Thai and they had been in a relationship for three years before Shirley came to England. Everyday they chatted online during the pre-session course and the first term. However the long distance romance had problems. Sometimes they had arguments online which made Shirley depressed. During the *Easter vacation* when Shirley went back to Thailand she found her boy friend had found another girl friend. She was furious about

the betrayal and decided to split with him immediately. However she was deeply hurt and was upset for a long time after she came back to England. Later she recovered, resurrected the relationship twice at a distance and split up twice more. The unstable relationship influenced Shirley's study and daily life greatly.

The second time when I interviewed Shirley she would never dream of achieving an excellent academic performance because she found that she was not suitable for work in academia. All she wanted from England was to pass her degree; to get her Master's certificate; to go back to her home country; to find a job; to get married and have children. Life was like that and she dared not expect more.

From the second term onwards Shirley paid less attention to the language and did not use the website to learn English any more. She also said that she had no interest to do games on a computer, and she liked to watch movies in Thai. For these reasons, she concluded that:

"maybe I am lazy, I am lazy maybe" (Shirley second round interview).

Shirley also told me that *in the second term* she was forced to work much more by herself as this was the culture in the department. Without more structure and tutoring Shirley lost focus.

From the third term until the summer vacation, there were no lectures in Shirley's department so she had time to explore different things. During this

period of time, besides writing her dissertation, Shirley had worked as a part time waitress in a local Thai restaurant, and subsequently as a part time domestic assistant at a nearby hotel to experience a different life in the UK. She was motivated to do her dissertation because she was interested in the topic which she had chosen and because she could draw on her own experience of studying in the UK.

She had also applied for several subject related jobs before graduation. However, she was turned down, a fact which discouraged her greatly. After the summer vacation she was planning to stay in the UK until the graduation ceremony to look for more jobs. She had found off campus accommodation and paid the deposit. Unfortunately *in September* her grandmother was ill and her family asked her to go back immediately. Reluctantly, she chose to leave future projects and went home in that September after she had passed her course. She was indecisive and at this point she changed her flight ticket three times before she suddenly decided to go back to Thailand without telling anyone else. Nobody knew the reason behind that, however three months later, in her Christmas greeting email, I learned that she was working as an English teacher in Thailand and her students were challenging, so she was busy with them all the time. In the same email, she explained to me the reason of her mysterious leaving as follows:

“ I'm hurry to go back to Thailand and i rarely talk to you during Sep because i had a serious problem about my family (the last grand mom that I have was ill) At first, i don't wanna go back because i already paid for the rent and everything so that why I was busy at that time.” (email from Shirley, 11/12/2005).

In general Shirley was satisfied with her improvement in English writing because before she came to the UK, even to write 50 words in English was hard for her, but after the one year's Master's course she could write several thousand words in English comfortably.

Shirley was from a rich family and she did not have any financial worries (from Shirley's first round interview). Her paid part time job was not undertaken out of financial necessity, but because she wanted the work experience.

Shirley did not talk much about her spoken English in her interview but from my research diary and my observation I found it improved greatly during the six months after she arrived in the UK. She explained that she liked to listen to tapes, radio, or watch films as models of spoken English which she tried to imitate. Sometimes she even imitated the same sentence more than ten times. After one year, her spoken English became very fluent, and she was capable of expressing her meanings in English freely. Moreover, she had even acquired some British accent.

7.3. Summary

In this chapter I make clear the second half part of my qualitative findings. The five narrative accounts in this chapter are less typical international students' experiences in the UK. In other words the accounts in this chapter are more complicated to categorise, compared with chapter 6. Based on this chapter, chapter 6 and my conceptual framework, the next chapter will be a modelling of students' experiences in Green University.

Chapter 8 Modelling of students' experiences

8.1. Introduction

In this chapter I am going to discuss my eight narrative accounts in relation to the conceptual framework I explained in my literature review chapter and the sub research questions I posed in my introductory chapter. Hence, the notion of “integrated international student experience”, which is the main contribution of this study to the literature will be presented and discussed as well.

8.2. Sociocultural adjustment

By social-cultural adjustment I refer to “the ability to ‘fit in’ and to negotiate interactive aspects of the new culture” (Searle & Ward, 1990). By successful adjustment, I adopted Ward et al. (2001) concept that “psychological well-being and satisfaction as well as effective relationships with members of the new culture are important components” in the educational process of international students.

My narrative accounts enabled the identification of two types of phenomena: (1) *Restricted participation* and (2) *Open participation*. Both of them are exaggerated models and none of the eight students falls exactly into one model in real life. I want to concentrate on these two idealised models rather than on the people because the models will be clearer and more helpful for others to reach beyond the particulars of the cases.

The phenomena of open participation consist of:

- frequent interaction with others in different contexts; interaction with people from a wide variety of backgrounds; use of English language in these encounters

In contrast, restricted participation consists of:

- frequent interaction with a small set of familiar people; interaction with people from a home or familiar background; use of home language in these encounters

8.2.1. Factors for open participation

Table 8.1 illustrates the personal and external factors which facilitate open participation. Examples are provided accordingly.

Factors	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
<i>Personal factors</i>	
proactive	Shirley liked to join parties and cooked food for friends
willing to accept new things	Paul did not like English food but he was able to change
planned for social life	Emily looked at the university pre-departure booklet and planned for her social life
extraverted person, enjoyed communicating with people	Emily and Shirley made a wide circle of friends
<i>External factors</i>	
had time	All had time during the pre-session course to take part in a social programme
could afford the expense	most had enough money to take part in activities, for example Paul was able to travel around Europe in the vacation
had chances to meet others	James's department organised four or five parties in the year and he attended all of them
ICT communication tools	Most students used online chatting system and email to get in touch with friends and relatives around the world

Table 8.1: Facilitating conditions for open participation

Constraining conditions for open participation

Table 8.2 demonstrates the personal and external factors which restrict open participation. Examples are provided accordingly.

Factors	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
<i>Personal factors</i>	
not proactive	Max was busy doing a paid part time job, attending lectures and improving his English so he did not proactively seek for any opportunities for social life
Reluctant to try new things	Alice said she needed to change her personality when talking with her Greek and Portuguese flatmates which made her uncomfortable so later she mainly spoke with Asian students
Did not plan for social life	Paul did not plan for any social activities
introverted person. did not enjoy communicating with people	Janet said she was “born not liking to talk” and she did not enjoy talking even in her first language
<i>External factors</i>	
Had no time	All had less time during the second term as they gave priority to main subject study
could not afford the expense	Janet was worrying about living in the most expensive accommodation on campus because she could not afford it
had few chances to meet others	Max lived in a house where he did not meet flat mates most of the time
ICT communication tools	Shirley had an argument with her boy friend online and they split and met again three times in the year

Table 8.2: Constraining conditions for open participation

8.2.2. Consequences

The following two tables show the consequences of open participation. Table 8.3 displays the consequences for open participation, while table 8.4 exhibits the consequences for restricted participation. Examples are provided accordingly.

Open participation	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
had or enhanced cross-cultural competence	Emily felt that she knew how to address people from different cultural backgrounds
made new friends	Shirley made many new friends by the second term
Enjoyed the experience	Almost all the students said they enjoyed their experience in the UK
learned or enhanced cultural knowledge	Alice became aware of cultural differences of people from various backgrounds
psychologically stable, became more confident	Simon was psychologically stable at the end of year and was more confident of himself

Table 8.3: Consequences of open participation

Consequences of restricted participation

Restricted participation	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
Little new cross-cultural competence and knowledge	Simon gained little cross-cultural knowledge in the year
Mainly made friends from home country	Most of Simon's friends were from his home country
Unease, indecisiveness, sense of fragility	Janet was worried and uncertain about her future in the third term

Table 8.4 Consequences of restricted participation

8.3. English language adjustment

By language skills adjustment, I refer to:

- a. using English language in daily life
- b. using English language effectively within the host country
- c. using English language in academic environment

The stories discussed above identified two types of language adjustment phenomena:

- (1) full language learners; and (2) partial language adjustment

The phenomena of full language adjustment consist of:

- Using English language without significant problems with a wide variety of people in a social context; using English language appropriately in both written and oral academic contexts.

By way of contrast, the phenomena of partial language learners consist of:

- mainly using first language rather than English with people in social contexts; having problems in using English in both written and oral academic contexts.

8.3.1. Factors for language adjustment

Table 8.5 illustrates the personal and external factors for full language adjustment. Examples are provided accordingly.

Factors	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
<i>Personal factors</i>	
had motivation to learn language	Max and Alice were motivated to learn English in the first term
devoted time to learning	Most students spent a large amount of time learning English during pre-sessional course time
was aware and able to use different language learning strategies	Shirley was able to use different language learning strategies in the first two terms
had strong language learning background	James had large amount of vocabulary and was good at English reading before coming to the UK
<i>External factors</i>	
had friends or course mates who were not speaking the same language	Emily's flatmates were international and they had to use English to communicate
Tutors encouraged students to use English	Alice spoke English to everyone she met at the pre-sessional course time because tutors encouraged her to do so
ICT tools	Shirley liked using online learning website to improve her English

Table 8.5: Conditions for full language adjustment

Constraining conditions

Table 8.6 shows the personal and external factors which restricted full language adjustment. Examples are provided accordingly.

Factors	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
<i>Personal factors</i>	
not motivated to learn English	Without any reason Paul did not like English so he was not motivated to learn English all the time
did not have time to learn English	In the second term most of the students were busy with their subject study and did not have time to learn English
relied on limited language learning strategies	Janet mainly relied on private study to improve her English
<i>External factors</i>	
Most friends or course mates were speaking the same language	Most of Simon's course mates and friends were speaking the same language as him
Tutors did not encourage students to use English	Janet's tutor did not ask students to do group work or presentation so she did not have a chance to use English in the class
ICT tools	Alice always chatted with her sister online in their first language

Table 8.6: Constraining conditions for language adjustment

8.3.2. Consequences

Table 8.7 clarifies the consequences for full language learners. Examples are provided accordingly.

Full language learners	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
improved language skills	Shirley improved her English speaking after one term
became more confident in language learning	Max was confident of his English learning at the end of the year
was more satisfied with year abroad experience	Most of students were satisfied with their year abroad experience though they said they could have achieved more

Table 8.7: Consequences for full language learners

Table 8.8 shows the consequences for learners who had partial language adjustment. Examples are provided accordingly.

Partial language learners	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
did not improve language skills	Janet did not improve her English after staying in the UK more than nine months
had no or limited confidence in language learning	Janet had limited confidence in language learning
was not satisfied with year abroad experience	None

Table 8.8: Consequences for partial language learners

8.4. Academic culture adjustment

By academic culture, I refer to “the systems of beliefs, expectations and cultural practices about how to perform academically” (Cortazzi and Jin, 1997, p77). The adjustment of academic culture means the adjustment to a different academic system of beliefs, expectations and cultural practices.

My research findings enabled me to ascertain two types of academic adjustment:

(1) Flexible academic adjustment, and (2) vs. inflexible adjustment

The phenomena of flexible academic adjustment consist of

- holding the academic belief and expectation of the host nation; performing like the host nation’s students academically

In contrast, the phenomena of inflexible academic adjustment consist of

- holding the academic belief and expectation of the home country; performing like the home country’s students academically

8.4.1. Conditions for flexible and inflexible academic adjustment

Table 8.9 reveals the personal and external factors which facilitated flexible academic adjustment. Examples are provided accordingly.

Factors	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
<i>Personal factors</i>	
was aware of the conventions of English academic culture	Most of the students realized the differences of English academic culture from their original one after they met frustration
was willing to learn the new conventions of English academic culture	Most of the students were willing to learn the new academic culture
was proactive	Max proactively sought for help (asking tutors and course mates, working hard) after he failed one of his examinations
communicated with tutors and course mates	James communicated with his course mates after he received a lower grade than he expected
was aware and willing to use learning strategies	Paul was seeking for strategies to adopt in the new academic environment
had high expectations of study	Most of the students had high expectations of their overseas study
devoted time	All the students spent much time on their academic study
<i>External factors</i>	
tutors and department were helpful	James's department put past examination papers online with model answers which was helpful for him to know the new conventions in the UK
ICT tools	Simon used instant online chatting software to do group work with his team mates

Table 8.9: Facilitating conditions for flexible academic adjustment

Conditions for inflexible academic adjustment

Table 8.10 displays the personal and external factors for inflexible academic adjustment. Examples are provided accordingly.

Factors	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
<i>Personal factors</i>	
was not aware of the conventions of English academic culture	Janet did not realize that there were differences in academic culture between UK and her home country
was not willing to learn the new conventions of English academic culture	Janet did not want to change herself to the new English academic culture because she did not recognise the differences
was not proactive	Paul never met his personal tutor because he “had no business with him”
did not communicate with tutors and course mates	Janet did not have much contact with her tutors and course mates
was not aware and not willing to use learning strategies	Janet relied only on a single learning strategy
did not have high expectations of study	In the second term Shirley was discouraged by her failure and just wanted to pass her course
did not spend much time	None
<i>External factors</i>	
tutors and department were indifferent	Janet said her department did not care for them much
ICT tools	Simon used instant online chatting software to chat with his girl friend every day in their first language

Table 8.10 Conditions for inflexible academic adjustment

8.4.2. Consequences

The following two tables (table 8.11 and table 8.12) clarify the consequences of flexible and inflexible academic adjustment. Examples are provided accordingly.

Flexible academic adjustment	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
learned the conventions of English academic culture	Most of the students learned some of the academic culture
adapted to English academic culture	Paul said he had learned most of the academic culture
improved academic performance	In the second and third term Max improved his academic performance
succeeded in assessment	Most of the students passed their assessment
was satisfied with overseas study	Most of the students were satisfied with their overseas study

Table 8.11 Consequences for flexible academic adjustment

Inflexible academic adjustment	Examples (e.g. of a person or some or all)
did not learn the conventions of English academic culture	Janet did not learn much of English academic culture
Had limited adaptation to English academic culture	Alice had only a limited adaptation to English academic culture
less/not satisfied with academic performance	Janet was not satisfied with her academic performance and wanted to achieve more
did not learn subject knowledge	None
had problems in assessments	Shirley, Max, Alice and Janet had problems in their assessments in the first term
was not satisfied with overseas study	None

Table 8.12: Consequences for inflexible academic adjustment

8.5. Integrated international student experience

If I merge the three aspects (sociocultural, language learning and academic culture) together, an **integrated international student experience** would be:

- Frequent interaction with others in different contexts; interaction with people from a wide variety of backgrounds; use of English language in these encounters
- Using English language without significant problems with a wide variety of people in a social context; using English language appropriately in both written and oral academic contexts.
- Holding the academic belief and expectation of the host nation; performing like the host nation's students academically

On the contrary, a **non-integrated international student experience** is:

- frequent interaction with a small set of familiar people; interaction with people from a home or familiar background; use of home language in these encounters
- mainly using first language rather than English with people in a social context; had problems in using English in both written and oral academic contexts.
- holding the academic belief and expectation of the home country; performing like home country's students academically

As I mentioned earlier, the **integrated international student experience** and **non-integrated international student experience** are idealised phenomena.

None of the students (N=8) in this research fitted exactly to one form of participation experience. One year was perhaps too short a period of time for cross-cultural adaptation to develop, not to mention the fact that intensive subject study might restrict students' opportunities to attend social gatherings. By the end of this research, most of the students in this case study had stayed in the UK for only 15 months; so the chance to attend a wide range of social events may not have occurred. Furthermore, most of the students were living on campus or near campus; their lives were more campus lives in an international setting, excluding UK social life, such as the church or the pub. To have a fully integrated international student experience, participants may need to stay in the UK for more than 15 months. However, most of the students just intended or only had the opportunity to stay in the UK for a short time, so they might never have the opportunity to have a fully integrated international student experience. Students' participation varied over different times in the year (I will explain this in the later "How **the integrated and non-integrated** international student experience swung according to time?" section). With all the difficulties raised above, I feel that it is more suitable to present students on a continuum over the year (see figure 8.1).

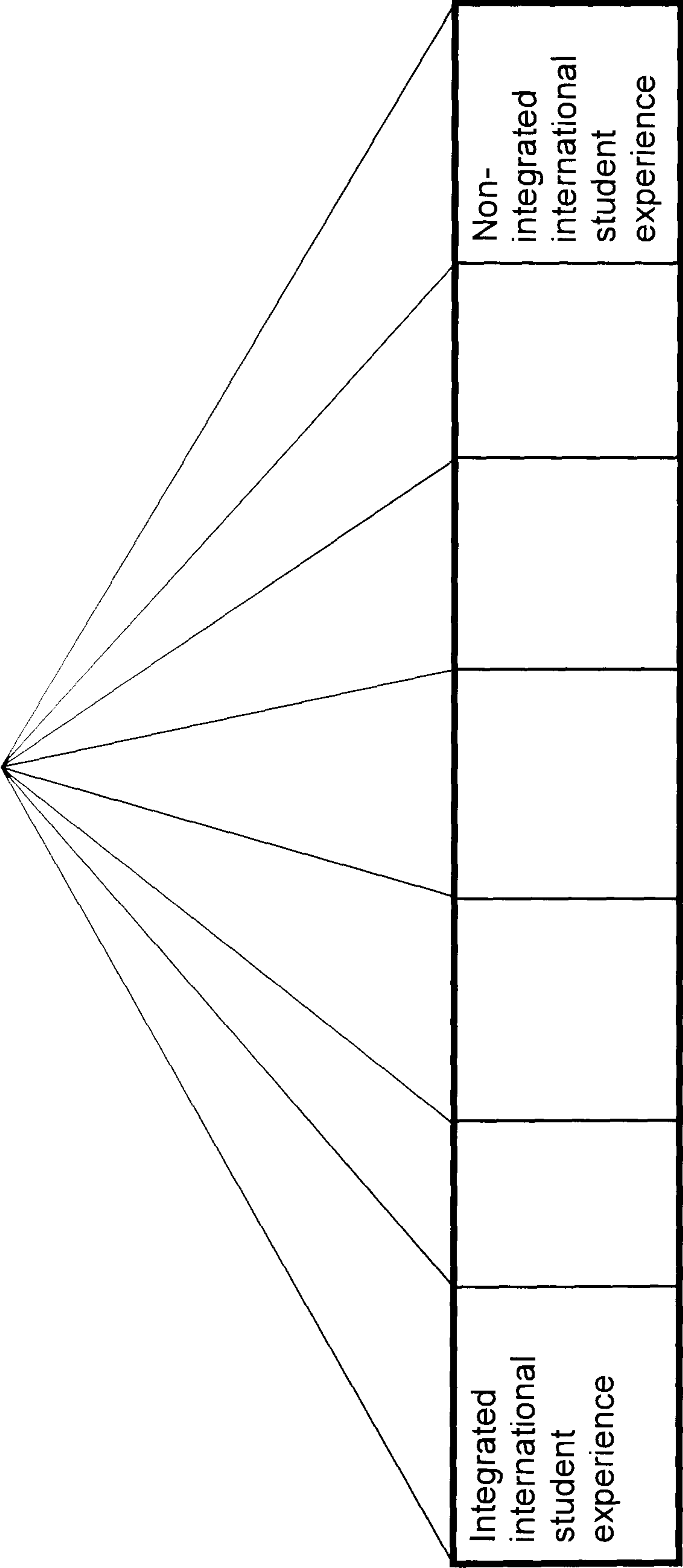


Figure 8.1: The International Student Experience Continuum

8.6. How the integrated international student experience related to the eight students?

This section provides accounts of how the notion of “integrated international student experience” related to the eight interview participants. On the continuum, there are four tendencies for this group of students: one was nearly integrated; another one was nearly non-integrated; and the rest were swinging between the two extremes of the continuum.

A. nearly integrated (Emily)

Emily has nearly integrated into the new environment as she has learned the conventions of English academic culture; she is emotionally stable and well; and had close relationships with local English people as well as other countries' international students. By the third term of the year she was able to use English fluently with various people in social and academic settings.

During the course of the year Emily had made many international friends, and she also had travelled to many places in the UK and continental European countries. Emily had chances to know different cultures during her year at Green University. She was satisfied with her year abroad because she was realising her dream and was learning new things all the time. She felt the experience was painful when she faced challenges like writing academic assignments in her second foreign language, doing group and team work, but through her efforts she overcame those barriers and finished her courses with

merit. She was on the way to full integration if she had had a longer time in England.

B. Nearly non-integrated (Janet)

Janet was different from the other students as she always limited herself to her own world and did not mix with others. She had problems with her courses, and failed in some of the modules, but she still kept her own Korean thinking style and did not go to ask for help from her tutors or friends. As she said she still thought that study was a student's own business, so she should rely on her own efforts rather than "disturbing" her tutors or friends. She did not have much contact with English people or international students from other countries. She also tried to interpret the new environment according to her old view (for example she assumed that her tutor or classmates might not help her if she asked them questions, though she had never tried to ask them). She was worried after the examinations because she failed in some modules and needed to re-sit. Though she claimed that she was happy about her life, she also indicated that she was not satisfied with her assessment grade as she thought she deserved higher grades. Her level of integration to the new environment was very low.

C. Mixed integration (Max)

Max's case was complicated. He had flexible academic adjustment, nearly full language adjustment, and he sometimes tended to have open participation in social life, but most of the other times he had more restricted participation in social life.

Max's life in Green University was different from the one he had in China, but also different from most of the other international students. He was focusing on his goals: doing a paid part time job and academic study, and he ignored almost all other things. He was pleased that in the year he had learned more than he had ever learned in any other year. He had some contacts with English students in his department but the topics were limited only to academic fields. Neither with Chinese nor English did Max have any close personal relationships. However he was emotionally stable and well because he was doing the things he really enjoyed doing. In terms of academic culture and language skills Max had a more integrated experience; however on the social life side of things he was non-integrated.

D. double swing integration (Alice, Simon, James, Shirley, Paul)

Most of the participants were swinging between an integrated international students' experience and non-integrated international students' experience. After 15 months' study and living in England, Alice, Simon, James, Shirley and Paul had learned new things from the new environment, and had reflections on their inputs. They were absorbing, digesting and acculturating in the new environment; meanwhile they were also considering, doubting and abandoning the elements that they regarded as worthless from the new input though they might not be aware of the adapting process. The level of their integration was swinging at different times in the year. Please see the following accounts for details.

8.7. How the integrated and non-integrated international student experience swung according to time?

As I have stated in the research methodology chapter (chapter 4), this research is NOT a “snapshot” of international Asian students’ experience in the UK. Rather, it is a longitudinal study which observed a group of students for 15 months from the language, sociocultural and academic perspectives. As human beings, it was natural that this group of people’s performance was changing according to time. Based on Burnett and Gardner’s (2006) model, I have identified three stages which reflected the experience of the eight interview participants in the year. Since five out of the eight students’ experiences were swinging between the extremes of “integrated international student experience” and “non-integrated international student experience”, two tables (table 8.13 and table 8.14) are given at the second stage and the third stage to display better the experience of “mixed integration” and “double swing integration”. Regarding table 8.13 and table 8.14, I acknowledge that my explanation of students’ experience is only a “simplification of the individual complexities” (Burnett and Gardner, 2006, p.90).

1. Stage one (pre-sessional course): **encounter**

a. enjoyed all the time (Simon, Alice, Emily, Max, James, Paul)

b. enjoyed half of the time (Shirley, Janet)

Shirley and Janet liked Phase one, but they did not enjoy Phase two.

c. learned English language skills, reading skills, writing, doing presentations in English, had experience on listening and speaking (all)

d. made friends with other international students, had orientation on campus (all)

e. had English food every day (all)

All the eight students in this research attended pre-sessional language courses shortly after they arrived in the UK. At that time they had a simple and regular life. From Monday to Friday they had English classes, which focused on speaking, listening, reading and writing skills; every Saturday they had excursions to places of interest such as Green Castle and Shakespeare's birth place. All the students in the pre-sessional courses were international students from all over the world (the majority was from Asia). As the English course was comparatively less demanding compared with the Master's course they had later, students had much time for social life. Almost all the students made close friends during the pre-sessional course time, and they kept in touch for the whole year. The friends students made in the pre-sessional course became important people in their overseas study. Though most students complained about food, over half of them said they enjoyed the pre-sessional time. Only two out of eight students said they did not enjoy the second phase of pre-sessional time because of the tutor or the course.

At this stage, nearly all the students were having an integrated international students' experience.

2. Stage two (term one): **disorientation**

Had problems with accommodation (James, Max, Janet)

Had problems in listening to the lectures, doing assignments, taking examinations (all)

Had problems in spoken English: academic English and everyday English (all)

Had problems in academic English writing (all)

Had a culture shock when meeting people from non-Asian background (Alice, James)

Had financial constraints (Janet, Max)

Had problems in English reading (Emily, Simon, Shirley, Max)

Had problems in using library researching skills (Shirley, Simon)

Lacked vocabulary (Simon, Shirley, Max, Emily)

Had food related problems (Simon, Max, Paul)

Was not sure about proper behaviour in the new environment (Paul)

Did not pass some of the assignments or examinations (Shirley, Max, Alice, Janet)

Had language and thinking style challenges when doing group work (James, Emily)

When the Master's courses (first term) started, students found that their lives became colourful and busy. Most students had language related difficulties. They also needed to get along with new flatmates; to deal with different assessment requirements; to come to terms with British food; to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds. Some of them had financial concerns as well. The following table (table 8.13) illustrates the five “swung in between” (NB: “mixed integration” and “double swing integration”) case study participants' experience at this stage:

	Flexible academic adjustment	Inflexible academic adjustment	Open participation in social life	Restricted participation in social life	Full language adjustment	Partial language adjustment
Alice	√		√		√	
Simon	√			√		√
James	√		√			√
Shirley	√		√		√	
Paul	√		√			√

Table 8.13: The “swung in between” participants’ experience at stage two

3. Stage three (latter part of term one onwards): **reaction**

When main subject study became more intensive: in terms of long hours in lectures; teamwork, tutorials; group work; presentations and assignments or examinations; most of the students did not put separate time into English language study.

In the third term most of the departments did not have lectures, but had only seminars and tutorials from time to time. When students had more flexible time, each student had a different way of dealing with their time. Some of them took advantage of the Easter vacation and went travelling (Paul); some of them went back to their home country and looked for a job in advance (Emily); some of them were preparing for examinations (James, Max, Janet, Simon); and some of them went back to their home country to meet their family (Shirley). At this stage, the “swung in between” (NB: “mixed integration” and “double swing integration”) case study participants’ experience is displayed in table 8.14.

	Flexible academic adjustment	Inflexible academic adjustment	Open participation in social life	Restricted participation in social life	Full language adjustment	Partial language adjustment
Alice	√			√		√
Simon	√			√		√
James	√			√		√
Shirley		√		√	√	
Paul	√		√			√

Table 8.14 the “swung in between” participants’ experience at stage three

Table 8.13 and table 8.14 demonstrate only five out of eight interview participants’ experiences at stage two and stage three in the year, as the other three participants’ experiences are comparatively straightforward to understand: one was nearly integrated, one was nearly non-integrated, and the third one had a mixed integration in regard to different aspects of his overseas experience, which I have explained in the “How the integrated international student experience related to the eight students” section (p.224). One thing that needs to be mentioned here is that table 8.13 and table 8.14 provide only a “simplification of the individual complexities” (Burnett and Gardner, 2006: 90) of the five “swung in between” students’ year abroad experience. As I stated before, the open participation vs. restricted participation; flexible academic adjustment vs. inflexible academic adjustment; full language adjustment vs. partial language adjustment are idealised phenomena and no students in this research fitted exactly in any type. Table 8.13 and table 8.14 can be used as only references to understand the students’ experience.

8.8 Summary

In this chapter firstly I used the conceptual framework which I discussed in chapter three to model students' experience. Secondly, based on the narrative accounts, I identified two types of phenomena and the internal and external factors for open/restricted participation in sociocultural adjustment. Accordingly, I illustrated two types of language adjustment phenomena, the personal and external factors for language adjustment, and the consequences for full language learners and partial language learners. In the same way, I defined the flexible and inflexible academic adjustment, and the conditions and consequences for flexible and inflexible academic adjustment. Then I merged the above three aspects (language skills, academic culture and social and culture) together, and defined the notion of ***“integrated international student experience”***, which is the main finding of this study. Lastly I discussed how the ***“integrated international student experience”*** related to the eight case study participants at different times in the year.

Chapter 9 Discussion

9.1. Introduction

The main object of this research was to explore Asian students' studying experience in the UK. I have used three key research methods to identify Asian students' experience in Green University over 15 months. The main research question pursued in this thesis was: **“What is the perspective of East Asian students on their experience of being at Green University?”**

and its sub-questions were:

- “1) What challenges have international East Asian students had to face at Green University?
- 2) What factors have contributed to or hindered language adjustment for East Asian students in Green University?
- 3) What factors have contributed to or hindered sociocultural adjustment for East Asian students in Green University?
- 4) What factors have contributed to or hindered academic adjustment for East Asian students in Green University?
- 5) What are the strategies that East Asian students could use to facilitate their adjustment to being at Green University?”

In chapter 6 and 7 I presented the data person by person. But I start this chapter by integrating the different case studies.

9.2. What challenges have international East Asian students had to face at Green University?

In this study, I have found that before coming to the UK, many students were expecting that they: could achieve a good proficiency in English, could have a promising career prospect, and could make many international friends. When they arrived in the UK, at first they mainly faced food related challenges at the time of the pre-session course. The toughest time for most of the students was the first term in their taught Master's courses, because students encountered challenges in both academic and informal English usage, adjusting to an English academic culture, and were operating in a new environment in their daily lives. In the second term the majority of the challenges came from academic related areas, such as taking examinations. In the third term challenges were less intensive, while by now most of the students were concerned for their future.

9.2.1. Pre-arrival and pre-session

Students were motivated to come to gain a good mastery of English, especially spoken English; and to enhance their career prospects and take advantages of the opportunities to learn about another culture (through making friends). This supported other research on overseas students (e.g. Makepeace, 1989; McNamara & Harris, 1997). Pre-arrival expectations included gaining subject knowledge (Simon), and doing a doctorate after the Master's (Janet). Concerns about making English friends were mentioned in interviews as well.

Survey findings show that most of the students had prepared practical materials (such as clothes or study materials) for their study before coming to the UK which implicitly indicate that most of the students (or their family) had considered the needs of their study and daily lives before departure. As discussed in Chapter 2, Cochrane (1983) emphasises the impact of realistic expectations on psychological well-being.

In this case many of their expectations were realistic but as we shall see later they had over-ambitious expectations about their improvement in the English language. This resulted in some feelings of disappointment and, in one case, of depression.

All the students attended a pre-session English course where they met other international students shortly after they arrived in the UK. Most of the students said they enjoyed the pre-session English language course time, and had a good orientation to the university. This was a more relaxed time when fewer assessments and subject knowledge demands were made on them. It was a time of change but did not appear to be one of great challenge. The only complaint from that time was food, because the students had to eat at the pre-paid university restaurant three times in a day, and the restaurant mainly served English food. All the students at pre-session were in a safe environment: things were organised for them by the pre-session course team, and all of their classmates had English as a foreign language. The first difficult challenges came during the academic year.

9.2.2. Challenges

The major challenges found are summarised in Appendix 7. These indicate that English related skills and making international friends were two of the greatest challenges for Asian students throughout the year. It can be seen that the extent of the challenge was greater in term one, and term two was dominated by concerns over academic performance.

In contrast to the UKCOSA (2004) survey, accommodation and finance did not come out as significant considerations for Asian students in this research, though over 90% of them were self-funded, and over half of them had never been abroad before. This may be because of the strict UK visa policy. Only students who can show that they have a substantial financial foundation for their stay in the UK can be issued a UK visa. Therefore the majority of Asian students in Green University had prepared enough money for their study and daily expenses. In a similar way, the promise from the accommodation office in Green University that all the first year international students can be allocated on-campus accommodation as long as they apply before the deadline may explain why accommodation was not among students' pre-arrival concerns in this study.

It seems that most of the challenges shown in appendix 7 (table a) came in the first term. Moving to new term time accommodation, the students in this research had met a more heterogeneous cohort of people. They had to face the challenge from all four aspects: their English language; they had to enter a subject based academic environment; they were far away from their home

countries and they had to fight with loneliness. As seen in appendix 7 (table b) in the second term the intensity and quantity of challenges reduced because students had got used to the new environment though their worries focused on academic related aspects, such as doing assignments and improving academic writing. In the third term challenges came less directly and in this period they were focused on making arrangement for the future (as seen in table c, appendix 7).

9.2.2.1. English language

Consistent with other studies (e.g. Badur, 2003) on international Asian students, my study shows that proficiency in English language was one of the biggest barriers for this cohort of Asian students. My findings match the results from Bailey (2006) that students encountered academic related language challenges, such as understanding academic terminology, understanding lectures where tutors' English was fast, with a non-standard accent, using colloquial English or local references. For example, Max mentioned that he could not understand the lectures in the first month because there were several hundreds of subject-related English terms that he did not understand. Though all the students in this research had received two and half months' English language study before they started their Master's course, they still encountered severe language related problems over their entire stay. Similar to other studies (e.g. Badur, 2003; Wang, 2004), among all the English skills, academic writing was a greater challenge for almost all the students because most of them had never written an assignment in English before. They mentioned the differences between English and Oriental writing

styles, which have been discussed by Kaplan (1966) (see Chapter 2, “academic writing problems”).

Consistent with Murphy-Lejeune’s study (2003), communicative competence was a challenge for Asian students’ adjustment in the UK. Linguistic competence, such as vocabulary, and sentence structure was a problem for some students (e.g. Emily, Max, Simon) as well. As Emily mentioned, at first she could not understand what her flatmates were saying, because there were many words that she had never heard before. Sociolinguistic competence, such as using the right expression in a suitable context and addressing people in the right way, was found to be a problem for almost all the students in this research though they might not mention it directly. Strategic competence, such as compensation strategies, was also a frustration at the beginning. However, after being in the environment for a while, students had consciously or unconsciously used strategies, such as compensation strategies, and body language to express their meaning. Makepeace (1989) stated that “Language is, ‘after all, a cultural device and shades of added meanings and subtle shifts of interpretation are associated both with the words themselves, and also with their associated contexts and other elements of non-verbal communication” (p.27). Most students realised after one year that knowing the rules of a language cannot be equated with mastering the language.

Students have particular problems in learning a completely unfamiliar language from another language family. My data reinforced the point that it is

difficult to move from one language family to another. The possible reasons for the consistently reported language difficulties could be seen from the following three perspectives: (1) the role of cultural distance, (2) the way of teaching in Asian countries, and (3) learning English at an advanced level. These perspectives are now discussed and addressed:

Cultural distance may play a role as culture is one irreplaceable component in foreign language learning, if, as Chan (1992) claims, culture is communication and communication is culture. As I discussed in Chapter 2, Hofstede's 5-dimensions of culture indicate that UK and Asian cultures have marked differences; therefore the way of communication between UK people and Asian people has a noticeable difference which can cause more barriers for Asian people in learning English.

Next I am going to discuss the second possible reason for language difficulties: the way of teaching in Asian countries. Among the four English skills, spoken English is the most problematic for many of the Asian students, because most of them reported that they had received a traditional grammar translation teaching method in their high schools. For example, Alice, Simon, Paul, and Max mentioned that at their high school, the teacher had the dominant role in the classroom while they rarely had opportunities to practise their spoken English. This finding is consistent with other research, for example, Takanashi (2004) found (in Japan) "the focus of the university entrance examination is mainly on grammar-translation" skills, and there is a discrepancy between the communicative aims advocated in schools and the

third level examination, which had a gate-keeping function (Takanashi, 2004). The grammar-translation teaching method was efficient for students like James who could get a high score, and built up a solid foundation of vocabulary and grammar. But others, for example Alice and Simon, lost interest in learning English at senior high school. Many studies (e.g. Cook, 2000; Barb, 2008) have shown that the standard method of grammar translation teaching fails to provide opportunities for practising the listening and speaking of English.

The data reinforced the notion that learning English to an advanced level is more difficult than learners felt it would be, perhaps because international students were led to believe by marketing advertisements that they could master English in a short time after arriving in an English-speaking country (Ayano, 2006). This belief and such implicit assertions stand in contrast to research (Thomas & Collier, 1997, p. 638) which has shown that "there is no shortcut to the development of cognitive academic second language proficiency and to academic achievement in the second language. It is a process that takes a long, long time".

After having had opportunities to study in an English-speaking country, most of the students had high expectations for their improvement in spoken English. This is consistent with other studies that indicate that improvement in speaking English is often the Asian students' pre-arrival expectation (e.g. UKCOSA 2004; Allen and Higgins, 1994). Students might think that being in the English speaking environment they could pick up the language

automatically. The unrealistic marketing advertisements may bear part of the responsibility for this (Ayano, 2006). My research has shown that it is impossible to have a high proficiency in English in four weeks. In the end they felt dissatisfied when they found their spoken English was not at as high a level of development as they had expected it would be. Corresponding with other research (e.g. Tanaka, 2002), my research shows that after one year, compared with the written English improvement, the majority of the participants were more satisfied with their listening and reading English improvement.

9.2.2.2. Making friends

In this research Asian students did not show much hardship when coping with their daily lives, an observation which corresponded with Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) findings. Consistent with UKCOSA 2004's and 2006's survey, the students in my research were less satisfied with their social contacts, and they found it difficult to make friends with local or other European students.

Lewins (1990, p. 101) gives three explanations for difficulties in making English friends: "without the ability to communicate freely and confidently, it was a great temptation to seek socialisation in national groups. If this occurred and friendships were established, it was found that there were fewer tendencies to break into a British group. Hence, as several interviewees explained, "provision of opportunities and the ability to seize them did not necessarily equate". Slightly in contrast to Lewins' finding, I have found some students who have attempted to make English friends in the first instance (e.g.

Alice). It might be argued that as they were not willing to change to an English way of thinking, they gave up their attempts.

According to Lewins, another reason for difficulties in making English friends is “While the research demonstrated that overseas students arrived in Britain usually enthusiastic to develop friendships with British students, success in this was reported to be limited. It was found that within the universities there was an inherent insularity amongst British students, who also had a penchant for the pub and disco as the basis for their socialization, and these venues were found not to be of interest to many overseas students” (Lewins, 1990:103). In a similar way, Volet and Ang (1998) report that due to culture connectedness, language preference, pragmatism and negative stereotypes, both home Australian and international students in their study preferred to work with their “own” groups.

Consistent with Lewins (1990) and Volet and Ang’s (1998) findings, this study has shown that Asian students had no interest in frequenting pubs with local students, even if they liked drinking. Here, English language and cultural connectedness posed problems, as many students said they did not know how to talk properly in pubs.

According to Lewins (1990), the third reason for struggles to make English friends is “it was felt that home students rarely made efforts to be friendly, and that if overseas students wanted to get to know them they were obliged to take responsibility for making this relationship work” (p. 103). Participants in

this research suggested that they had to be proactive if they wanted to make English friends, and they questioned why they needed to be the initiator. Overall, though most of the students in this study did not have much contact with local people and local students, most of them enjoyed their lives while they were in Green University. Their co-national friends gave them great help when they met frustrations. This corroborates other findings (e.g. Sykes & Eden, 1987).

9.2.2.3. Psychological challenges

Looking at appendix 7, one can see that informants also encountered some psychological challenges, such as missing home and depressing feelings in the year.

The U-curve hypothesis and “culture shock” is a starting point to discuss the cross-cultural psychological adjustment process. In this research, chronologically, I have identified three stages for international Asian students, which are: encounter, disorientation and reaction (see Chapter 8 for details). Agreeing with Anderson (1994), I found that students did not start from an “easy and successful” life, but rather, had a “mixture of positive and negative emotions about the new milieu”, while some students had depressing feelings but others had not. The second stage “disillusionment” has been identified in my research when students had to handle challenges in their lives. However, the next stage was more complicated than the U-curve hypothesis: some students (e.g. Emily) have integrated into the new environment and in a sense have adjusted, while other students adjusted in the opposite way (e.g. Janet). The majority of the students, however, were swinging between integrated and

non-integrated on the spectrum. My classification of the three stages of Asian students' experience is influenced by Burnett and Gardner's (2006) model which reflects the experience of their students. The model envisages stages in the process of adaptation categorised as: encounter, disorientation, reaction, independence and internalisation. Nevertheless, since not all the students were working towards integration, the "independence" and "internalisation" stages are not applicable for all the students in my research. Instead, after the "reaction" stage, students recorded various responses which I have discussed in Chapter 8.

There are many criticisms of the U-curve hypothesis, one of the greatest ones being that "the theory is more a description of phases of adjustment than a theoretical framework of how and why individuals move from one stage to the next" (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). In general, students had encountered some psychological challenges in the year, but these were relatively mild, when compared with the challenges presented by acquiring English language and making international friends.

Summary

Overall, the key challenge Asian students faced in this research was English language and the skills related to it, such as written English and communicative competence. Students were excited about their lives at the beginning, but this was followed by greater realism and in one case feelings of depression when they faced challenges. It was seen that making English friends was a problem for Asian students, but most students did not feel

stressed by this, because they could find support from their co-national friends. In this research, all the students attended a pre-sessional language course, where they improved their academic English; had a first encounter with UK study methods; and made co-national or other international friends. As a result of the pre-sessional course the impact of challenges which they faced in the first and second term were lessened.

9.3. Factors that have contributed to or hindered adjustment for East Asian students in Green University

The next section discusses the following three research questions:

“2) What factors have contributed to or hindered language adjustment for East Asian students in Green University?”

3) What factors have contributed to or hindered sociocultural adjustment for East Asian students in Green University?”

4) What factors have contributed to or hindered academic adjustment for East Asian students in Green University?”

As seen in Chapter 8, the factors which facilitated or hindered students' adjustment in Green University were aggregated from: *“Facilitating conditions for open participation”*; *“Constraining conditions for open participation”*; *“Conditions for full language adjustment”*, *“Constraining conditions for full language adjustment”*; *“Facilitating conditions for flexible academic adjustment”*; and *“Conditions for inflexible academic adjustment”*. I am going to discuss the following key variables: residences, friends, media, locality, travelling, course-mates and food (see table 9.1). In a sense they embody

both opportunities and constraints for students' ability to integrate with the new environment. These are like a knife that can either hurt you or help you- it depends on whether you hold the blade or the handle.

9.3.1. External factors

By external factors I refer to the situational or environmental factors, which are opportunities or obstacles in the circumstances where participants are living. These are discussed below:

Residence

Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs indicates that the basic needs of a human being, such as food, housing, and a safe and predictable environment are the foundation of higher level needs (e.g. self-development). Accommodation is extremely important for international students because the place they are staying is their home during their studies (Lewins, 1990). The UKSOSA 2004 survey indicates that accommodation is one of students' pre-arrival concerns, though this research did not prove this concretely.

In this study, many of the students' flats accommodated a wide range of nationalities. However, within the case study (N=8), apart from Emily, all the others had only limited contact with their flatmates/housemates. Nevertheless, Emily said that she was just fortunate because the opportunity to have so many nice flatmates was out of her control. It was by chance that there was one flatmate whose main subject was business management, and who wanted to practise his organisational skills, so he volunteered to be a meeting

facilitator. Also, by chance, everybody in the flat was friendly and open-minded, and was willing to make new friends.

Friends

Consistent with other studies (e.g. UKSOCSA 2004, Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006), many of the case study participants were satisfied with their friends, so they did not want to find friends from other backgrounds. If staying with friends who were from the same country, they preferred to use their first language as they regarded it as a natural thing. Many students complained at the end of the year, their spoken English did not improve as much as they expected before they came to the UK. Staying in the comfortable first language zone was one of the factors that hindered students' language progress.

Nevertheless, when students moved out of their same-nationality friendship circle and managed to make friends with students from other countries, the situation changed. For example, Max, who tried to make friends with his English classmates, found he learned different "thinking styles", which was vital for learning modules and passing examinations. He said that since Chinese students shared similar strengths and weaknesses in the courses, it was sensible not to stick with Chinese. Similarly, as mentioned before, Emily's international friends broadened her perspective and gave her more opportunities to improve her language. These changes came about partly as a result of individual choice, and partly due to the environmental factors. For example, students found that they had less chance to meet local people outside the classroom; they had language difficulty; they were lacking common topics with other countries' people. This finding matches results from

Ward (2001, p.19) who makes the observation that “the presence of international students alone is insufficient to foster intercultural friendships”.

Being in the new environment, some students argue that their main purpose in coming to the UK is to get their degree certificate and to learn academic knowledge which will enhance their competitiveness in the career market. To know people from another culture and to increase cross-cultural competence are not their main concerns. This finding is consistent with Elsey's (1990) statement that overseas students want to return home ‘with the inner satisfaction and the outward measure of successful academic achievement’ (p.47) (see Chapter 3, p.55). To know people from another culture and increase cross-cultural competence is not their main concern. Furthermore, some students may think that one year is too short to diversify their efforts, therefore they need to put their limited energy into the most important thing: their degree.

Media

The survey finding reveals that nearly all the students often watched English movies and read English newspapers; however, English novels were not as popular as movies and newspapers. From the qualitative data, it was surprising to see that not many international students watched TV frequently, especially for those who were staying in university accommodation. Since the university had 24 hours free broad band internet access in all student accommodation, most of the students just read news or watched TV online when they felt necessary.

The language of reading or watching news was another issue. Some students, like Emily and James just wanted to know the content of the news, so they read news in their first language. Other students, like Shirley and Alice, wanted to know what happened in the world but they also wanted to improve their English listening and reading skills, so they read the news in English.

Students like Janet read newspapers and listened to the radio regularly because of their personal preferences. They used media as a helpful way to get in touch with local society and the world. So the impact of media on students is mixed.

Watching English TV has been found to be one missing part in this group of students' daily lives. This is opposite to Zeng's (1997) finding, where most of the participants in the research spent most of their spare time watching TV. If Storry and Child's (2002) claim is true that the dominant medium for cultural exchange in Britain is TV then it was unfortunate for students in this research because students have missed the opportunities to know contemporary life in the UK. In addition, they missed the opportunity to improve their English listening skills. On the other hand, the heavy reliance on the internet by international students for communication and for obtaining information challenges Ye's (2006) view that "perceived support from interpersonal networks in the host country and from online ethnic social groups was negatively related to social difficulties" (p. 249). I have found that sometimes relying too much on an online ethnic social group impedes international

students' social interaction with local people, as they had fewer opportunities to attend face-to-face social activities.

Locality

Probably because of the physical location of the university, most of the students ate out, or went to the nearby city centre frequently. Though the university was like a small town, the choices for food, grocery and shopping were still limited. Many students liked to leave the campus and observe "real" British daily life. Nevertheless as a result of financial concerns (like Max) or personality reasons (like Janet) some of the students just stayed around campus most of the time. In general the "small town campus" is ideal for peaceful study, but not that wonderful if one wishes to experience "real British life". This is partly consistent with Badur's (2003) research, which claims that living in a small town limited international students' access to the outside world, was not convenient, and offered fewer opportunities.

Travel

For Asian students, it is much cheaper to travel from England to continental European countries than to travel from their home country (in Asia) to Europe. Most of the Asian students took advantage of the geographical location and travelled to many nearby countries. Many students said that they learned new things from their travelling and became more independent. Travelling also improved students' time management skills and increased their deeper understanding of European culture, which was new to most of them. This finding supports Ayano's (2006) study that claims that the travelling experience satisfied a group of Japanese international students who failed to

have more opportunities to meet British or non Japanese people in their host town in the UK.

Course mates

For some students their course mates were made up from various nationalities, so they had more opportunities to mix with a culturally varied group. Nevertheless, even for students whose class was international, some Asian students (e.g. Janet) still did not mix with other nationalities. This was partly because their tutors seldom arranged group work or class presentations in or after the class, partly because they did not proactively try to speak to their course mates. This finding is consistent with Ward (2001), who claims that home students and international students prefer to work within a monocultural working group, and they do not spontaneously mix together.

On the other hand, in some departments, over 70% of students were from the same country or region. Students in these groups lost many opportunities to know other cultures and people when they were in touch with their course mates. As Channell (1990) argues, the departmental environment was essential for students as they spent a great deal of time with their course mates and tutors. If the class mates were international, students had more chances to mix with people from different backgrounds, and would feel more satisfied in the international background.

Student-tutor relationship

In this research, I found there are two extreme types of student-tutor relationship. One type is the student who has a close relationship with the tutors and socialises with them. The other extreme is some students who had no contact with their tutors. Most of the students who had contacts with tutors appreciated this flexible academic system, and claimed that they learned more from this relationship in the UK than from the hierarchical relations with their tutors in their home countries. This is consistent with Liberman's (1994) study, which reports that Asian students find the relationship between academics and students is friendly and close. They believe this is beneficial for learning. Not surprisingly, students who had few contacts with tutors did not find any differences between the UK and their home countries, which matches the result by Schutte and Winqvist-Noble (2006), who claim that some students were not aware of some of the supporting facilities which were provided by the university or department. Furthermore, the student-tutor relationship in this study corresponds with Bailey's (2006) summary for the "*The International Learner: Enhancing the Student Experience*" conference which was held in Southampton 2006. She reported that the relationships between students and academic staff are very different from each other in the UK.

Academic subject

Academic subjects had impacts on students' academic adjustment as well. Students who needed to write English assignments had a deeper understanding of academic English writing, and their written English improved

more quickly than that of students who did not need to write assignments. Brew (1980) argues that Asian students achieved better results in mathematics based courses but this was not evident in my study. Asian students who have a strong mathematical background may be at a disadvantage when it comes to other aspects of the academic challenge, such as English language skills and the understanding of a new academic culture, and as a result of such deficiencies they might not have opportunities to show their mathematical strength.

Food

For some people their stomach is very sensitive about the sort of food they are taking every day. If they did not have appropriate food for some time they would feel ill. For example, in this study Simon cared much about food and spent much energy on finding his favourite meals to eat, whereas other people did not care much about their diet as they were happy to take anything that could feed them. In this study, as far as most of the students were concerned, though they preferred their own countries' food, they still could survive with other regions' recipes. In the year 2004/5, at Green University, all the campus restaurants and canteens served only European or Indian style meals. So it was a problem for students who liked only their own national cuisine. The problems became less serious when students could cook for themselves.

However, "What to cook today?" was another question for students like Max or Paul who had no experience of cooking before. Both of them lost much

weight in the year as they could not afford to eat out every day. They learned basic every-day cooking out of necessity as a result of their hungry stomach but they were still not happy about their own cooking at the end of their study. They said they were cooking only for the purpose of surviving.

This study supports Houghton and Dickinson's (1992) survey, which found that students' complaints about food decreased over time, and the nature of complaints focused on "the high percentage of fried, fatty food, the lack of variety and the high cost" (Houghton and Dickinson's, 1992, p.37). This study opposes Schutte and Winkvist-Noble's (2006, p.123) report, which claimed that "in this day and age of international cuisine and global trading, no student in our sample group had a problem with finding food to their liking".

It is easy to underestimate the importance of food. As a matter of fact other cross-cultural research has shown that food is a salient area of study (e.g. Pearson-Evans, 2006). Food has been shown to be of "central importance in creating and maintaining social relations, both within and between cultures, and food preferences to be intimately connected with individual, group and national identity" (Pearson-Evans, 2001, p.46). Students complained about food, because they were away from a familiar environment, complaining about food became one way to express their unstable feelings.

Finance

In contrast with Houghton and Dickinson's (1992) survey, which states that financial problems affected 21% of the students on arrival, and influenced a

higher percentage of students later, financial constraints did not appear to be a significant variable in this research, though most of the students were self-funded. This also seems to contrast with the result from the BBC (2006) research, which found that students who need to do paid part time jobs to pay their daily living expenses and study missed out on socialising with other students. Of course the BBC's study would primarily have been based upon the experience of home students. In the case of this research perhaps the reason that finance did not come as a big concern may come from the fact that students received information from the university before departure, so they planned well. Again, here time is an issue. If students stay longer, the situation may change. They may run out of money, or want to learn skills from paid part time jobs.

Religion

In contrast with Wang (2004), as the young generation of the country, this group of students did not tend to have strong religious beliefs. Some of them have been to church, but they were not very serious. Some of them were Buddhists before they came, and they went to the temple to worship when they were in Green University. But again, they were not very committed. In this study, religion did not come out as an important variable either.

In summary, I have shown various external factors which may hinder or facilitate East Asian students' adjustment in Green University. Coming to a new community presents students with many opportunities but also frustrations on the other hand, because some opportunities are out of

students' control. For example, students have no control of the people they will meet in their accommodation or in their class. Having international course mates or flat mates cannot ensure any smooth adjustment. In a similar way, opportunities for feedback, which have been discovered to be helpful for language improvement and academic adjustment, may depend on what kind of team mates they are asked to work with on a project, with whom they are living and whom they meet during everyday activities, and also the enthusiasm of the tutor.

9.3.2. Personal factors

Having discussed the external factors affecting the adjustment of Asian students, this section looks at the personal factors which influence students' adjustment process.

Attitude

Students' attitudes towards the new environment were another key element for their cross-cultural adjustment. As Lynch (1992) argues, to gain cross-cultural competence, the sojourners need to have "a flexible mind, an open heart, and a willingness to accept alternative perspectives. It may mean setting aside some beliefs that are cherished to make room for others whose value is unknown, and it may mean changing what we think, what we say, and how we behave" (Lynch, 1992, p.17). In this research, some of the informants had an open mind toward the new environment, and they were willing to learn, so they were proactive and had more opportunities to know the new conventions which turned out to be helpful for adjustment. On the other hand,

when they had no intention to learn, or when they refused to accept any new things in their lives, the learning/adapting process slowed down or even terminated. This finding supports other studies (e.g. Church, 1982; Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985) that willingness to communicate, to establish relationships and to be tolerant are important variables for adjustment.

The other thing is, in contrast with the concept of “adjustment”, which uses the acceptance of host culture as one of the main criteria of successful adjustment (e.g. Brislin, 1981; Black & Stephens, 1989), my research argues that the relationship with the host culture is not vital for Asian students’ daily lives and academic adjustment. Many participants agree that in the long run, it would be beneficial for international students if they learned new conventions of other cultures, which includes the host culture, while they are abroad. Nevertheless, it really depends on what students want to achieve outside of their study. For students who will return to their home country after a certain period of study, they may choose to decline changes in many aspects. In a sense they may benefit more from the interaction with other international students, or students from their own country, in terms of the professional skills, the knowledge they might attain or the network to which they desire to gain access before they come, or their psychological well-being while they are in the UK. As a matter of fact, Chen (2001) found that the international Taiwanese students who had only a shallow level of interaction with the host culture and who insisted on keeping their own values “experienced happiness and comfort when they returned to Taiwan” (Chen, 2001, p.234).

Personality

Ryckman (2004) claims that personality can be defined as dynamic, organised and uniquely held characteristics which makes an individual different from others in terms of cognitions, motivations and behaviour in various situations. A succinct codification of definition is given by Wagner (2005) who states that “personality is made up the characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that make a person unique.” In addition, she argues that “personality arises from within the individual and remains fairly consistent throughout life” (Wagner, 2005). Chen (2001:21) claims that “previous investigations have shown sojourner adjustment to be positively correlated with open-mindedness, flexibility, cultural sensitivity, extroversion and modernity”. An extreme case in this study is Janet, who claims that she was born not liking to talk. She did not mention the reason for having this kind of personality, which could, in itself, have been a reflection of her taciturn nature or could indicate a lack of self-reflection in her psychological make up. Whatever the reason for her silence on this matter, it was certainly the case that her introverted personality impeded her being able to accept the new circumstances that she found herself in. In contrast to Janet, Shirley, who was an extroverted person, acquired a wide circle of friends who gave her valuable guidance when she was in need of it.

Motivation

According to Kleinginna and Kleinginna (1981), the concept of motivation signifies the internal reason or condition that guides behaviour and gives

direction. Many motivation theorists believe that a learning behaviour will not happen unless one is motivated.

Two kinds of favourable motivations have often been discussed in learning: intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is “when the only reason for performing an act is to gain something outside the activity itself, such as passing an exam, or obtaining financial rewards” (Williams & Burden, 2000:123). Conversely, intrinsic motivation is manifested “when the experience of doing something generates interest and enjoyment, and the reason for performing the activity lies within the activity itself, then the motivation is likely to be intrinsic” (Williams & Burden, 2000:123). It is generally believed that a mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation prompts many of our actions (Williams & Burden, 2000).

This investigation of Asian students indicates that informants’ learning performance is stimulated by both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. However, the impact of motivation on students’ performance has been influenced by other factors, such as environment and personality. Nevertheless, there are indications that positive motivation is a facilitating factor in successful adjustment.

Cultural background

Coinciding with Brew’s (1980) findings, this research confirms that past learning experience influences students’ view of learning and knowledge. Similarly, Bailey (2006:18) found that the Chinese and West African

international students in her study needed time to adjust to the UK methods of assessment because “the assessment strategies that had been successful in their home country were not appropriate in the UK context”. In addition, in accordance with existing literature (e.g. Brew, 1980), my research indicates that students’ discussion of their work varied according to their cultural background and personal preferences.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, all in all, people are a product of their culture, though individuals show considerable diversity in terms of their daily performance. Briefly, I agree with Chan (1992), who states that Asian cultures are among the highest context cultures in the world. By saying this, he means that in Asian cultures, the physical context or unuttered information has a much greater weight than the verbally transmitted part of the message. In addition, Chan claims that Asian cultures also reflect a collectivist orientation, where harmony, face and human relationships have been more highly valued than in other cultures. Agreeing with Chan, Ainslie et al. (2006:5) found that “Our international students have a different cultural and educational background from our home students and from ourselves (assuming we are British). This can lead to misinterpretations and misunderstanding of concepts”.

My study has indicated that as a result of culture orientation, my participants’ first aim in this English university was to get their degree certificate. After prioritizing earning their certificate, they then wanted to gain access to practical skills, and then find a good job. This is consistent with Elsey’s

(1990:46) claim that “Overseas students have a pressing need, perhaps above all else, to return home with their inner satisfaction and the outward measure of successful academic achievement”. It was obvious that most of the Asian students in this research put a priority on gaining their degree certificate; and next the mastery of useful career skills. This is the case because they would think that the process of gaining a certificate and gaining competitiveness in the job market is synonymous with the process of personal development. Here, the rationale in the ranking of learning priorities for overseas students is obviously influenced by their culture background, and has a significant difference from their UK counterparts (Watt, 1980). Meanwhile, as I discussed in Chapter 2, we need to refer to culture with great caution, and the term of “Asian cultures” just serves as framework for us to understand participants in this study better.

9.3.3. Person and environment

Nobody lives in a vacuum. Everybody is the result of a particular social, cultural, educational and political context. People have a propensity to behave in a certain way, but this can be reinforced by environment. On the other hand, the environment is perceived in different ways by different individuals. As Williams and Burden (2000, p.192) point out, “learners’ perceptions and interpretations of their environments will affect their learning rather than the actual physical characteristics of those environments”. For Williams and Burden, what appear to be physical barriers to one group may be regarded as acceptable norms to the other groups.

In a sociocultural environment, many factors, such as the politics and the weather are out of the control of recipients. Nevertheless, some personal factors, such as attitude are under personal control. For example, if an individual is willing to change, after making efforts, he or she can become proactive, open-minded, and tolerant, which are facilitating factors for cross-cultural adjustment. Therefore one recommendation for a smoother adjustment to English skills, academic culture and sociocultural environment is: on the individual level, students need to be proactive and open-minded in everyday situations, but on the environmental level the university needs to think about how they place students in accommodation and, at the departmental level, tutors need to create opportunities for collaboration across ethnic groups. Other recommendations for stakeholders will be proposed in the concluding chapter.

External Factors	Personal Factors
Residence	Attitude
Friends	Personality
Media	Motivation
Locality	Cultural background
Travel	
Course mates	
Student-tutor relationship	
Academic subject	
Food	
Finance	
Religion	

Table 9.1 key factors which influenced Asian students’ adjustment in Green University

Summary

I will now go on to discuss the situational factors and personal factors which may facilitate or hinder Asian students’ language, sociocultural, and academic adjustment in Green University. Table 9.1 summarises the key factors which I

have discussed in this section. It is noteworthy that most of the external factors are out of the control of the individual, while some of the personal factors, such as attitude are under the control of a cross-cultural traveller.

9.4. Strategies that East Asian students could use to facilitate their adjustment to studying at Green University

The following section presents a discussion about the strategies that Asian students have adopted at Green University.

“5) What are the strategies that East Asian students could use to facilitate their adjustment to studying at Green University?”

Table 9.2 suggests that all the students had used various types of formal and informal strategies while they were in Green University. Some of the strategies were focused very much on academic adjustment. Other strategies were strongly associated with language learning such as using a dictionary, listening and transcribing tapes. The rest were mainly associated with social cultural adjustment such as going to social gatherings, learning from flatmates or peers.

Within all the strategies, the most popular strategies for academic learning were getting feedback from tutors (either by asking, or learning from their comments); using new technologies (ICT); and private study. A further strategy was more community focused. Most strategies in table 9.2 could be

covered in the above mentioned three popular strategies, because using new technologies can mean using an online database for obtaining resources and it can also mean using a learning website to gain information. Private study can mean practice and working hard, it also can mean rehearsing with a tape recorder.

Strategies	Emily	Janet	James	Max	Paul	Simon	Alice	Shirley
Using ICT	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Asking for feedback from tutor	√	√	√	√	√	√		√
Private study of learning material (e.g. textbooks)	√	√	√	√	√	√		√
Learning from flatmates and peers	√		√		√	√	√	√
Using a dictionary for understanding meaning in context		√	√	√		√	√	
Attending social gathering	√			√	√	√		
Imitating models of speaking and writing				√		√		√
Using skimming and scanning to improve reading speed	√		√					√
Playing games with computer to improve general skills					√		√	√
Rehearsing presentations						√	√	
Asking feedback from proofreader	√					√		
Learning from course peers and team members	√					√		
Using newspaper as a way to improve reading skills		√						
Listening and transcribing tapes				√				
Attending in-sessional classes							√	
Building an informal community	√		√		√	√	√	√

Table 9.2: Summary of strategies mentioned by participants

Next, I will illustrate the most popular three strategies in detail.

9.4.1. Getting feedback

Many students felt that effective feedback was necessary to identify specific problems, and guide them to move on to a higher stage. This supports Channell's (1990:77) view that "constructive feedback was seen as crucial before students could judge their performance and thus know how to proceed". There were several ways in which students sought out feedback. This study has shown that learning from mistakes was one of the most effective ways of improving. For example, Shirley asked her English friends to read for her assignment and felt that getting feedback from proofreaders could help her avoid repeating the same mistakes. Alice, on the other hand, thought that to get feedback from the tutor was the most effective way to help her learning. James knew that his way of thinking was different from his European colleagues by attending social gatherings and getting feedback from people with whom he was chatting. By getting feedback from flatmates, from tutors and from friends, an individual has a sense of who he/she is, how different he/she is, and whether he/she needs to make changes in that direction.

9.4.2. ICT use

Information communication technology was used widely to help students adapt to the new environment. As Yang (2001) stated, "the Internet has the potential to provide a new learning environment that has rich digital textual, graphic, audio, video and other interactive features for the language learning approach as well as for culture"(p. 448). The Internet is considered a key-factor in enhancing the learner's motivation for both language learning and linguistic proficiency (Yang, 2001). With the integration of ICT in language learning, new activities, such as electronic communication via email or chat

rooms, interactive email, web chat, MOOs, IRC-multimedia activities, web-based reading, and task-oriented activities have been widely adapted. Consistent with Xue's (2005) finding, this study has indicated that ICT has been adopted as a learning strategy for Asian students in a wide range of circumstances.

Students used the online chatting system to communicate freely with their friends and relatives all over the world. They also found the internet was important for them to get up-to-date news in the world, buy online tickets, do online shopping, and even to get cooking guidance. After finishing their courses some students moved to off-campus accommodation to wait for their graduation ceremony. Some began to feel homesick for the first time because there was not an internet connection at their new place of residence. This finding matches Ye (2006) who claims "just recently computer-mediated ethnic social groups have become another important source of social support for international students" (p.4). She further argues that online social support is helpful for stress reduction, which was especially more beneficial for international students who stayed a short time in the US in her study.

For academic use, some students used emails to get feedback from their tutors and used the university intranet to access past examination papers online, which they found particularly supportive to guide their revision. They routinely used electronic sources in their study.

9.4.3. Private study

Asian cultures are, in part, influenced by a Confucian heritage in which each student has a responsibility to practise and work hard. As Holmes (2005) claims, it is strongly believed by people who are influenced by Confucian heritage culture that success comes from effort and willpower. This puts the emphasis on personal dedication and commitment. As James put it 'I think hard working is very necessary ... No-one is stupid, they are always clever, so if somebody put more time into study, they can get (a) better performance.' In a similar way, Rogers (1998) argues "the UK students' cognitions are centred on a concern with ability, unlike their Chinese counterparts who tend to emphasise the strategic use of effort" (p.275). As a tradition, putting efforts into private study is a strategy that has been widely used by Asian students. Nevertheless, private study is a strategy which is suitable only for learning. It is not commonly applicable for sociocultural adjustment, because most of the variables in the environment are out of personal control.

9.4.4. Building up an informal community

Some students were members of the overseas students' community, for example joining and taking part in societies such as the Green Korean, Green overseas and Thai societies. The regional student communities were effective in assembling students together and relieving their loneliness and homesickness (if there was any).

Here, the notion of community of practice is helpful to understand the experience of these students, particularly the manner in which they were

drawn from the periphery into pre-existing social and academic practices (Wenger et al., 2002). In the community members exchanged information, helped each other, organised trips and parties and regular events. Many of these societies were very active, so each member could contribute something and could benefit from the society. Normally senior students would give more help to junior students, and after some time junior students became more mature, so they became senior students and could help newcomers. These societies offered an informal network for study support as much as a social outlet. It seems that to be part of this kind of active and supportive community was helpful for students if they were to make a smooth transition in meeting the demands of their new circumstances. However, there is a danger in applying such a strategy wholesale, thus failing to recognise the individualised nature of some of their learning. In addition, misunderstanding and prejudice may carry over from senior members of the community to junior participants.

Table a in appendix 7 and the above discussions illustrated the general and the most popular strategies which were adopted by Asian students in Green University in the year 2004/5. Using ICT, asking for feedback and private study were the most popular strategies which I elaborated in more detail. However, how effective the strategy is, how many strategies to use, and at what time to use what strategy depend on the individual. It is out of the scope of this study to probe them. The value of strategy investigation in this study is to help learners broaden their view and take advantage of a wide range of learning strategies from which they can choose in different situations.

In this study, the findings of learning strategies have thrown light on three ways of describing learning. These are discussed below:

1) The *first* view is learning by individual effort. This belief is widespread in Asian cultures, which are, in part, influenced by a Confucian heritage in which each student has a responsibility to practise and work hard. This puts the emphasis on personal dedication and commitment. In this study, all the students adopted strategies of private study such as learning new vocabulary by heart, imitating what they had seen or heard; tackling English text books; rehearsing; interacting with the computer. It should be added that the majority of the students were self-funded, and most of them were financially supported by their family. Some students, like Max and Shirley, felt that since they paid high fees they had to work harder than local students if they did not want to waste money. Others could feel the pressure from their family, though the pressure always came in the form of expectations.

2) A *second* view of learning is learning from a more knowledgeable other. In this study, this might include tutors, proof readers; learning from authentic models of English and learning from more knowledgeable peers. This view of learning is often referenced against Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and the role of others in helping the learner to cross their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky 1986; Adamson & Chance 1989).

3) The *third* view of learning is learning by participation in a community. In this study, this might include attending social gathering and everyday participation in domestic and study activities with peers. Such activities frequently provide

the motivation for using English. For example, Shirley said that when she was in Thailand, she also enrolled for an English language 'cram' school, because she wanted to improve her English. However, she did not stay enrolled as she could live comfortably without using English in her daily life. When she came to the UK, she was forced to study English seriously as everybody around her could speak good English, so she had to learn otherwise she could not survive. "It was for the purpose of surviving"! she claimed. This view of learning is influenced by notions of community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002).

It is sensible to argue that a range of strategies are important and it would be folly for learners, and also researchers, to "put all their eggs in one basket" and to rely on one view of learning. And, which strategy to adopt at what time also depends on the context. For example, the strategies for learning academic norms will be different from the strategies for language learning. My research suggests those who were most satisfied with the development of their language skills used a range of strategies. Emily is a good example here of someone who used private study to enable her to take part in social activity. In contrast others used private study as an *alternative* to participation. This was particularly marked in one student (Janet) who remained dissatisfied with her progress and who failed her final examinations.

It is worth mentioning that the above discussed learning strategies are actions which are taken from the learner's/sojourner's perspective. If, as I discussed in the facilitating/constraining factors section, both situational factors and

personal factors are meaningful for Asian students' adjustment, then "situations must be structured to foster these processes" (Ward, 2001, p.19). (NB: according to Ward (2001), the "processes" refer to intercultural interactions, intercultural friendships and international understanding). For host institutions, Ward (2001) states that peer-pairing programmes, cooperative learning and residential programmes have been proved to be helpful to promote positive cross-cultural adjustment.

Summary

This section discussed the strategies that have been adopted by study participants while they were in Green University. Table 9.2 summarises the strategies that have been mentioned by informants. Private study, ICT use and getting feedback in different environments were the most popular strategies among students. My study has shown that the adoption of strategies has been influenced by the individual's cultural background and past learning experience. With great caution, the notion of "community of practice" is helpful to understand the students' experience in this study.

9.5. The perspective of East Asian students on their experience of Green University

Now, this chapter focuses the discussion on the overarching research question:

"What is the perspective of Asian students on their experience of being at Green University?"

Many of the English universities, such as University of Green, have a wide range of students (Green University has students from more than 120 countries). The international postgraduate students have a special life which differs from the local people's life, but is also different from their home countries' life. As Wang (2004) found from his Chinese international postgraduates in his research:

"..we are culturally marginalized people, not attached to cultures either in China or in the US" (p.253).

Yeh (2001) argues that this group of international students holds an "international postgraduate culture". She claims this culture is:

"the pro-individual, autonomous style, the knowledge-oriented, information-rich conversational content; and the academic, fact-finding approach" (p.251).

The findings in this research support this view of an "international postgraduate culture" within a campus university. As most of the international students had a plan of their postgraduate study, they were more autonomous, and more knowledge oriented. For example, they might need to go to the city centre and to have limited contact with local people, like going shopping, asking for directions and so on, but if they preferred they could stay with their peers and fellows (non-local) all the time. Furthermore, students were more interested in knowing how they could get their degree and what learning strategies other students have used. As temporary residents in the UK, their thoughts focused more on using strategies to deal with their study and daily life, on future developments such as what they would do after their graduation and much less on UK's contemporary life.

In addition, many students held on to their involvement in events in their home country through the use of ICT (Xue, 2005); they made friends with students from similar backgrounds but had little interaction with local people or indeed with students from the UK. This is not to say that their identity remained unaltered. If identity in practice is “an experience that involves both participation and reification” (Wenger et al., 1997, p.163), then their sense of identity altered through engagement in a more international perspective (Yeh, 2001) and different set of academic values and practices.

On the other hand, students were more adept than others at constructing strategies which enabled them to adapt to the new environment. In fact, in this research I found it is helpful to describe students’ experience as a continuum. One extreme covers students who are highly motivated, and who take a proactive approach towards participation in their new environment. These became more likely to communicate and cooperate with others and this led to a virtuous circle in which motivation leads to actions which lead to greater confidence and back to greater motivation. This type of student is having an **integrated international student experience** which is characterised by:

- frequent interaction with others in different contexts; interaction with people from a wide variety of backgrounds; use of English language in these encounters
- using English language without significant problems with a wide variety of people in a social context; using English language appropriately in both written and oral academic contexts.

- holding the academic belief and expectation of the host nation; performing like the host nation's students academically.

At the other extreme is a vicious circle whereby a student lacks confidence; does not participate proactively within the environment, and finds the initial lack of confidence reinforced. This type of student is having a **non-integrated international student experience** which is characterised by:

- frequent interaction with a small set of familiar people; interaction with people from a home or familiar background; using home language in these encounters
- mainly using first language rather than English with people in a social context; having problems in using English in both written and oral academic contexts
- holding the academic belief and expectation of the home country; performing like the home country's students academically.

Most students, not surprisingly, lay between these two extremes, switching between periods of proactive and more reactive or passive forms of engagement.

I am aware that the experience of international Asian students is dynamic, changeable and complicated. Everybody is unique so it is harmful to stereotype any individual or any group. My notion of "*integrated international student experience*" is not static and I claim that students' experience are located on a continuum and are swinging between the *integrated* and *non-*

integrated poles. The different types of experience have evolved at various times in the year when students met diverse circumstances.

Overall, Asian students' studying experience can be seen as a process of facing, overcoming and solving a series of challenges in the new situation. As discussed in the literature review chapter, this process is called "adjustment" (Anderson, 1994). International students, who are moving from one part of the world to another part for the purpose of study can be regarded as cross-cultural sojourners. Their study experience is also their cross-cultural adjustment experience. In addition, Anderson (1994) also states that, generally there are four reactions towards the problems which are faced by cross-cultural travellers in the new environments. As a reminder here, the four reactions are:

- a. changing oneself
- b. changing the environment
- c. not doing anything
- d. running away

This study shows that for language skills and academic culture aspects, most of the students chose changing themselves in the light of the problems they faced. All the students in this research volunteered to come to the UK for their higher education, and all of them had pre-arrival expectations about their overseas study. In this sense I can say none of them planned to run away before they finished their study, and my research confirmed this. Interestingly, nobody made any attempt to change the environment. This may be

interpreted from a culture perspective, if as Chan (1992) claims, Asian cultures value harmony and face. For Asian people who are influenced by Confucian culture, in a short period of time, it is out of their personal power, and also not in their tradition, to change the environment. The two phenomena: *integrated international student experience* and *non-integrated international student experience* which are found in this research have shown that most students either chose changing themselves or not doing anything in the new cultural environment.

9.6. Summary

Drawing evidence from my qualitative and quantitative findings, this chapter answers my overarching research question and its sub-questions in great detail. In addition, I compare my research results with the literature which has been discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. One thing that needs to be emphasised here is the concept of “*integrated international student experience*”, which is a new notion that no other research has mentioned. Reflecting on the facilitating and constraining factors that influence students’ adjustment, I also discuss the impact of personal attitude and environment on students, and make some suggestions. The following chapter presents a conclusion of the thesis.

Chapter 10 Conclusion

10.1. Introduction

The main goal of this thesis has been to investigate Asian students in the UK. This chapter provides an overview of the research followed by the research findings and their contribution to greater understanding of East Asian students. It also presents recommendations and implications, assesses the strengths of the research and its limitations and the reflections on these issues on the part of the researcher.

10.2. Summary of the research

This thesis aimed to look at postgraduate Asian students' learning in one English university. The focus was on language skills, academic issues and social interaction. The research explored students' pre-arrival expectations; the challenges students encountered when they were in the university; the academic, language skill and socio-cultural adjustments that they made during their stay in the UK, and the strategies they used to facilitate their adjustments. The study used a mixture of methods – questionnaire, research diary and interviews in order to achieve a credible account of these experiences. Data were collected and coded in order to detect and describe patterns and themes. The narrative accounts presented the qualitative data in a story-telling way. This was followed by a modelling based on other researchers' work (e.g. Burnett and Gardner, 2006).

The discussion chapter addressed the research question and sub-questions. It compared key findings with the literature; and drew out new notions of students' experience. A model of "*integrated international student experience* " was presented and discussed in chapters 8. Table 10.1 presents an overview of the development of the thesis.

Chapter	Overview
Chapter 1 Introduction	The reason for doing this research Significance for doing the research Research questions
Chapter 2 & 3 Literature review	Pre-arrival concerns On arrival Returning home English language Academic culture Socio-cultural environment Culture Academic culture Adjustment
Chapter 4 Research methodology	How I started to do my research How I shifted my research focus The basis for my research My research approach and design The process for analysing qualitative and quantitative data Researcher's role Validity and reliability Triangulation and Nested Strategy Ethical Issues
Chapter 5- 7 Research findings	Survey questionnaire findings Interview and research diary findings (eight narrative accounts)
Chapter 8 Modelling	Discussion of the narrative accounts related to conceptual framework The " <i>integrated international student</i> "
Chapter 9 Discussion	Discussion of the research question and its sub-questions Comparison of findings with literature
Chapter 10 Conclusion	Summary of the thesis Findings of the research The research contributions Recommendation and implications Research strengths and limitations My reflections on this research

Table 10.1 – The research development

10.3. Findings of the thesis

In this thesis, I identified some key findings and I will give a brief summary here. From the first sub-research question, “What challenges have international Asian students had to face at Green University”, I have identified three key findings.

The first key finding is related to the pre-sessional English language course. It is noteworthy to see that majority of the students enjoyed their time on the pre-sessional course, which lessened the impacts of the challenges that students faced in their first and second term. The second important finding was, not surprisingly, about English language proficiency. It remained a big barrier for Asian students’ adjustment. Among the four skills, progress in academic English writing and speaking (the so called productive skills) were the areas in which students were least satisfied. The third key finding is that the hardest time for Asian students was in the first term.

With regard to the second, the third and the fourth sub-questions: “what factors have contributed to or hindered language adjustment for Asian students at Green University?”; “what factors have contributed to or hindered socio-cultural adjustment for Asian students in Green University?” and “what factors have contributed to or hindered academic adjustment for Asian students in Green University?”, this thesis found that key factors that may facilitate or hinder Asian students’ language adjustment, socio-cultural adjustment and academic adjustment are: residence, friends, media, locality, travel, course mates, food, finance, religion, attitude, personality and

motivation. Within these factors, attitude and environment (e.g. residence, media, and course mates) were shown to be two of the most important variables.

From the fifth sub-research question “what are the strategies that Asian students could use to facilitate their adjustment to being at Green University?”, my research indicated that students adopted several strategies to meet academic requirements in a new setting. Getting help from tutors, using new technology and private study were reported as the most helpful strategies.

A major finding identified by this thesis was from the overarching research question, “**what is the perspective of East Asian students on their experience of being at Green University?**”. I have found that Asian students’ experience swings on a continuum. At one extreme is the “integrated international student experience”; while at the other end is the “non-integrated international student experience”.

Other findings which arose from this research that I want to emphasise here are:

First, about students’ pre-arrival concerns. Having a good command of English, finding a job in desired areas and making friends were the most often reported concerns for Asian students before they came to the UK.

Second, about “culture shock” and the “U-curve hypothesis”. My findings show that these Asian students did not experience culture shock, and the U-curve hypothesis was not applicable.

The *third* is in respect of students’ socio-cultural adjustment. Asian students were reported as tending to make friends with co-national or other Asian students.

The *fourth* is regarding students’ academic adjustment. Some students reported that they had a close relationship with their tutors, and they appreciated this flexible student-tutor relationship; whereas some other students had no personal contacts with their tutors, therefore they had no comments about UK’s student-tutor relationship.

The *last* major finding is about subject and academic adjustment. This research shows that the students who had not been required to write many assignments did not improve their academic writing as quickly as students who needed to write a large number of assignments. On the other hand, Asian students who were doing mathematics related subjects did not perform better than any other students.

Overall this study has presented a fairly positive (in some cases very positive) account of studying in the UK, while hardship and feelings of depression were rarely reported in Asian students’ daily life.

10.4. The contributions of the thesis

This thesis makes a contribution to the general literature, to academic institutions, and to international students in practice.

10.4.1. To the conceptualisation of international Asian students' experience

My contribution to the knowledge base is the notion of "integrated international student experience". This is a new concept and has not been identified before: though Yeh (2001) has mentioned the idea of "international postgraduate culture", and Wang (2004) has referred to "culturally marginalized people" (p.253), nobody has really drawn the picture of international students' experience. One of the key features of the "integrated international student experience" is that it is an international students' experience, rather than a target culture students' experience. Here the centre is "international". This new concept adds significant value to current thinking about international students' experience. This notion could also be used to interpret international students' behaviour in other similar contexts. The "integrated international student experience" provides a dynamic view of students' experience. As discussed in the previous chapters, the majority of the Asian students' experience swung along the continuum of integrated international student experience and non-integrated international student experience. This dynamic notion is a contribution to the conceptualisation of international Asian students' experience.

Many other researchers (e.g. Ward et al., 2001; Lysgaard, 1955) deal with cross-cultural sojourners in general, such as international business people, immigrants, refugees and international students. Within the comparatively limited research on international students' experience, most are descriptive

reports of students' experience without a concrete model or concept. For example, Tanaka et al. (1994) carried out research on international students in Japan and found that

- 1) Asian students generally were less adjusted than those from Western countries
- 2) U-curve patterns were not evident in three of the four factors
- 3) Better proficiency in Japanese language did not prove better adjustment
- 4) Scholarship recipients were better adjusted.

Others, such as Murphy-Lejeune (2003), propose a model for learning abroad which is based on:

- 1) knowledge (factual knowledge, socio-cultural realities, study/work-based knowledge in a professional milieu, language proficiency and communicative competence)
- 2) strategic skills (autonomy and self-confidence)
- 3) social competence (communicative and social confidence, relational ease or how to get on with people)
- 4) personal and interpersonal attitude (openness, critical awareness of self and others).

Nevertheless she admits that her model is descriptive and does not carry guidelines.

A recent contribution is from Chen (2001), who proposes a dynamic framework of cross-cultural adjustment. She argues that it “depends on students’ personal perception of cultural diversity and the events encountered”; postgraduate Taiwanese students’ adjustment involves four types of changes. Type one represents a minor change at surface level, in which most of the informants keep their own values due to inability to change or unwillingness to learn. Type two involves making changes from surface level to a middle layer in which participants perceived a sense of failure and shock. Type three moves from the surface layer to the middle layer, then straight to the deep layer which involves substantial changes. The last belongs to an “elite” in Taiwan who have a clear goal and great confidence. Their adjustment is from the middle layer straight to the deep layer. Chen’s framework is dynamic, sound and well-justified. Whereas her multi-layered framework is more a model of cross-cultural adjustment that international Taiwanese students follow in the UK, but less a holistic view of international Asian students’ overseas experience.

10.4.2. To research methodology

A further contribution is that I used a narrative analysis to present my data which is not common in qualitative research. It is open to debate but offers a model contribution for people who are interested in doing research in this field in the future. In addition, I have used qualitative software- Nvivo and quantitative software-SPSS - to analyse my interview and questionnaire data. There is little research in the existing literature (about international students’ experience) that combines the use of both qualitative software and

quantitative software in one study, so my study is valuable in this area to inform future research.

This research project set out to look at students' performances for 15 months and showed that students' behaviour changed over time. It enriches the existing literature because it shows a more vivid picture of Asian students in the UK over one academic year, while many other studies focus only on current students for a short time.

10.4.3. To international students, researchers and academic institutions

The research provides cultural interpretations of the development of East Asian students' academic behaviour and activities in the UK. It provides meaningful insights into understanding East Asian students' performance in English universities. As such it is beneficial for both international students and host UK higher education institutions. Therefore the study informs researchers, students, teachers, and institutional administrators in the UK and Asian countries. It has a particular value for international Asian students because in contrast to the marketing proposals (e.g. Bateman 2006), as an international student, I am doing this research in order that other international students may benefit.

As Byram and Feng (2006) claim, study and living abroad is a new research field in the UK. In general, this research is a contribution to this field which shares the triumph of success and presents warnings and worries to researchers, academic institutions and international students who are interested in this topic.

10.5. Recommendations and implications

Research findings in chapters 5-7 drew attention to relatively high levels of satisfaction from students studying in this UK university. As one student put it “I have never learnt so much in one year before”. However, there were gaps between students’ pre-arrival expectations and their experience. In particular the level of difficulty in studying in English and using English in both academic and informal settings was much greater than anticipated; the courses were often more theoretical than they had thought; and also the qualification when achieved would not turn out to be such a guarantee of an attractive job as they had thought.

Overall, the picture is a more positive one of overseas study experience than is often presented but a major concern is that student expectations may have been unrealistic. Perhaps this is a product of the increasing marketing of higher education (Yoshino, 2004; Massy, 2004). International students had accepted an over optimistic picture of study and life in the UK and a recommendation arising from this research is that students need to be given more realistic information about their courses in advance and be alerted to the need for better preparation, in particular in respect to language skills. Since “word of mouth” has more weight for Asian students than for other ethnic groups, for the long term profit of the higher education industry in the UK, marketing advertisements are urged to provide a more realistic picture of studying in the UK.

As mentioned in the discussion chapter, it is important for host universities to create a positive environment beneficial for both international students and the host university. It is a win-win solution for both sides: host universities can attract more international students, who will bring an academic and cultural dynamic to their campus, and increase the host institution's annual revenue. For international students, they can learn more in a limited time and have a more positive life. Here are some suggestions for a host University:

- a. Run workshops for university staff to increase their cultural awareness.
- b. Organise more social events to promote international students' social interaction.
- c. Introduce conventions of UK academic culture at the start of the course, put past examination papers online with mock answers.
- d. Run more courses to help international students improve their academic writing.
- e. Encourage local students to mix with international students, consider accommodation strategies which assist.
- f. Encourage collaborative learning events which provide opportunities for students to mix and learn from each other.

There are also some tips for international students:

- a. Have a clear expectation of what you want to achieve before going abroad.
- b. Prepare better English before departure. Do not expect that your English will become excellent just because you are in an English-speaking country!
- c. Be proactive and be open-minded.
- d. Try to make international friends.

- e. Be prepared and use a range of learning strategies.
- f. Watch English TV.
- g. If you have an opportunity, go to attend several weeks' pre-sessional English course, or have a short orientation of the campus before starting the Master's course.

10.6. Strengths and limitations of the thesis

The strengths of this research are:

1. I spent ten weeks staying with my informants. I learned interpersonal communication skills from the part time jobs I was undertaking in the university international office and university recruitment office which helped me set up a rapport with my participants. I was friendly and helpful, so my participants liked to share their experience with me. My research findings give a credible account of student experience.
2. I have traced this group of students for 15 months, and have collected data at different stages in their study. It is not a "snapshot" of students' experience, but rather, a vivid description of students' performance which changes over time.
3. Besides the conventional research methods: interview and questionnaire survey, I have also adopted a research diary (by the researcher) which came from my observation and daily contacts with students. The triangulation that I was able to obtain from different research methods strengthened my research.

Every research has its limitations, and mine is not an exception. The limitations of this research are:

1. This research focuses only on one UK university with a limited number of Asian students. In addition, Asian students who use English as one of their government official languages are excluded in this research. The research results can neither be generalized to all international students, nor to every Asian student.
2. As a double-function insider (I am an international Asian student in the UK, and an academic researcher) I am interpreting the phenomena according to my understanding, which, unavoidably, will have a bias. Though I have used different research methods to triangulate my research data, and have asked my colleagues and my interview participants to read my work and give comments, I have to acknowledge that prejudice still exists.
3. Because of the time constraint, I am not able to show a clear picture of students' returning home experience (I would say "after research experience" here because some of them are still living abroad) though I have a brief idea of who is doing what now. Research in this area is very limited. An up to date further research on international students' returning home experience is recommended.

4. Concerns only students who had the benefit of a pre-sessional course- someone should make a comparison with those who (a) think they do not need it!, or (b) cannot afford it.

10.7. My reflections on this research

As Lincoln and Guba (1985: 327) suggest, “researchers give information about the *self* if the researcher is the *human instrument* as the meaning of keeping the reflexive journal”. Accordingly the following summary shows my personal reflections when I was doing the present research.

My research is about study and living abroad, and actually I am one of the students who are studying far from my home country. The whole process of my Ph.D. project was a learning procedure for me. I learnt with my research informants. Now, it has been two years since I finished my field work, but I still keep in touch with most of my research participants. Their story is the miniature of the young Asian generation at the beginning of 21st century. Through doing research with this group of students, I have learnt the enablers of an integrated international students’ experience; thereafter I am attempting to use their learning strategies in my life. I should say it has worked for me so far. For example, one aspect that many Asian students ignore, but which is really important is the psychological well-being: how to motivate a person, how to keep an individual emotionally stable, how to reduce worries. I am glad that I have learnt this aspect from my own research and have implemented it in my study life.

It has been four and half years since I started to do this Ph.D. research. I have met enormous frustrations and uncountable worries since then. Nevertheless in general I am positive about my study and personal life, and believe that all my efforts will eventually pay off.

Another issue about which I have become more aware is that of the importance of using feedback in academic writing. Some of my English friends have helped me proofread my English writing since the first year of my Ph.D. study, despite that I did not read their feedback carefully until recently I was modelling for restricted international students' experience. Drawing models helped me understand myself more. The above are two examples that I had after doing my research.

On the other hand, my personal experience involved reflections on my research as well. For example, as I stated in the introductory chapter, because I have benefited from ICT (new technology) I had a hypothesis that ICT would be helpful for all the other international students. That was the starting point of this research. As time went by, however, while I shifted my research focus my research still closely relates to my personal experience. For example, since my first year in the UK, I had worked: in a restaurant, cafe bar, library, retail supermarket, university student recruitment office, university residential team, university international office and university language centre. All the part time jobs I have done had one common theme, that they were dealing with people. My various kinds of work experience enabled me to develop my interpersonal communicative competence, though I was not

aware of that at first. For one or two years because I had severe financial problems I had to keep two or three part time jobs at the same time. In some circumstances I had to talk, talk and talk with hundreds of people in a day. It was often a hard time for me because by nature I was not an extroverted person, but in order to keep my job I had to learn to talk with people in a professional and polite way. I did not realise that I had learnt those skills until I met other colleagues who told me that they had problems in communicating with their field work participants. On the other hand, I had to admit that doing too many paid part time jobs took my energy, hence delaying the outcome of my research. I believe that if a different person did this research the results would be different.

10.8. Summary

This final chapter draws a conclusion for the whole thesis. It summarises the entire research, and presents its key findings. Then it goes on to spell out the contribution made by this research to existing understanding, the recommendations and implications for stakeholders, and the strength and limitations of the research. Finally a personal reflection of the impact of the research on the researcher herself is put forward.

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Appendix 1

ICT confidence on language

Code
All= 6 people Some =3 people Most=5-6 people A few= 2 people

A = Janet B = James C = Max D = Paul E= Simon F= Alice

High confidence in using ICT for language learning

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Agreeing ICT is helpful		1			1	1
Having confidence in using ICT			1		1	1
Thinking online dictionary is helpful	1	1	1	1	1	
Thinking ICT can help improve listening and speaking		1				
Can use PowerPoint for learning			1			
Agreeing ICT is interesting		1				
Were able to get various type of ICT materials and reference for learning		1				
Having confidence in using BBC website for language learning				1		

Most students thought an online dictionary was helpful for their English language learning. In their opinion, an online dictionary could store bigger vocabulary, “the web version dictionary is quite big to store the vocabulary. If I can’t look at word in my dictionary, I just look the web” “online dictionary can be updated” “online dictionary is very convenient” “they (online dictionaries) can develop according to the development of the society”. Some students had confidence in using ICT in their language learning. They thought ICT was helpful, and played an important role in their study. “The network computer and ICT have helped me a lot. Although I have more opportunity to contact

with English speaker face to face, but it's limited". "using ICT you don't need to consider about other people's condition". Other positive attitudes toward ICT are that ICT can help listening and speaking; PowerPoint is helpful; online material and database is helpful for writing, though students thought it could not help their writing in a direct way.

Low confidence in using ICT for language learning

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Having no confidence in using ICT: not a good user	1			1		
Don't like using the web	1					
Do not trust free software		1				
Thinking ICT can't help writing		1	1	1		

Compared with students who were confident in using ICT, some other students expressed their doubts and suspicion of ICT. A few students said they had no confidence in using ICT, and they did not think they were good ICT users. Other students thought ICT could not help their writing, though ICT might help their listening or speaking. For some personal reasons, one out of six students just did not like using the web.

Conclusion

For most people, ICT is just a new thing which has been introduced in the learning system in recent years. Most students did not systematically learn how to use ICT. Most people use ICT just because they feel that they can benefit from it. For example, if they need to do a presentation, they would try to learn PowerPoint because they felt that they needed it. But if they are comfortable with their present situation, they may not want to bother to use any new technology. For most students, their only reason for choosing an ICT programme would be convenience. This probably accounts for why most students have confidence in using an online dictionary, and think an online or CD-ROM dictionary is helpful.

Generally, students who are from a science and engineering background have higher confidence in learning ICT---- they think they can learn software in a short time, though not all of them are interested in using ICT in their English language study.

Appendix 2

Initial 47 codes

1. settle down
2. orientation
3. learning strategy (strategy for setting down)
4. self assessment
5. problem
6. enjoyment
7. general English study
8. time management (lack of time for language learning)
9. contrast between language study and using language
10. unconscious language study
11. interest (motivation)?
12. teaching method
13. grammar learning
14. examination technique
15. impact of assessment on writing
16. feedback
17. teaching technique
18. guide from technique
19. learning aim
20. successful learning skills which have been used
21. learning from TV
22. self contentment of writing
23. writing style
24. writing skills
25. impact from previous learning background
26. subject
27. ways of thinking
28. vocabulary
29. choice of word
30. accuracy of meaning
31. grammar
32. ICT use in general
33. computer dictionary
34. learning website
35. watching news for learning
36. game and language learning
37. watching movie and language learning
38. cartoons and language learning
39. routine life in the pre-sessional course
40. routine in term time
41. friends' nationality
42. time to practise
43. CD for watching
44. choice in spare time

- 45. ICT tools for language learning
- 46. object for learning
- 47. attitude toward writing through ICT

Appendix 3

Themes from coding

Code	Themes
1	Progress
2	Time
3	Feedback/Assessment
4	Motivation/priority
5	Informal learning strategies
6	Academic expectation of English
7	Instruction
8	4 language skills+ grammar (vocabulary)
9	Culture acclimatising
10	Priority learning
11	ICT confident on language
12	ICT impact
13	ICT use
14	Confidence
15	Level of satisfaction
16	Exam skills
17	Expectation before coming to the UK
18	Future plan
19	Personal background
20	Practical issues- money/accommodation
21	Subject choosing
22	Suggestions for new comers

Appendix 4

Displaying qualitative data

Language skills: motivation of learning and priority of learning

Janet

First round	Second round	Third round
Newspaper is good, colourful, prefer to read newspaper in Korean and English version	Watch movies for the purpose of recreation and relaxing, want to improve listening English as well	
Though web full of any kind of materials to learning English, but because have to stop in front of computer, so feel bored and don't want to		
Motivation to buy a laptop: have to use economic package, but don't want to go to IT service every time, want to use university database		
For economic mathematics, economic sole, using through the computer programme, a kind of statistics related to economics, have to run the programme in the web, using computer, have to buy		
	Exams are a pressure, have to resit and do dissertation at the same time	
	Keep trying to say more but born to talk less	

Table 1

James

First round	Second round	Third round
Don't have many		

opportunities to write in English		
Like English when first started to learn English, because want to use English fluently and communicate with classmates, but after 11 years English does not reach the level imagined before		Think English is not good, but still enough for survival
At high school got pressure from the entrance exam to the university so score of English did not go down		
Good university needs high mark so they get best students, in undergraduate stage, have more freedom than the high school, don't have any pressure from the teacher, only have pressure from the graduate examination and graduate dissertation		Tried not to use tape recorder to catch up with lecture
Visit the English website, listen to the radio for the purpose of improving English	Do internet browsing for relaxing not for learning English	When watching English movies tried to listen in English but was so tired, so just chose Chinese, don't want to listen to radio in English because feel sleepy
Like football, go to football club website read sports news in English –can read everything from Chinese website so didn't need to visit English website		

Table 2

Max

First round	Second round	Third round
Writing process of doing the experiment, get the data and analyse it is	So skip and scan because don't want to waste time	

more important than writing skills		
		Use MP3 to practice listening comprehension or listen to the music, but when not in good mood put MP3 aside
		Sometimes want to listen to the radio for a short while but don't want to bring radio
Want to remember some specific vocabulary to enhance the career prospects because used to see a interpreter who failed in translation and was fired though her general English was good		Attending job interview is important for career because it contained questions have to describe, think about and express it, get feedback, also need to look at the interviewer to get the feedback from them to change talking and thinking way
English study needs different ways to improve When first arrive, memorize words, work out grammar, memorize beautiful sentences and practise speaking	English study needs different ways to improve Later improve English by reading, listening to the radio, and asking how to spell the word and its meaning	

Table 3

Paul		
First round	Second round	Third round
Always don't like English since starting to learn English, always don't like---no reasons	From May started to watch film and TV in English again, have more time to speak to others as well	
When in hometown (Thailand) no environment to study English	Think to have a good English is important if you want to have any working experience in overseas countries	
Do the assignment for the sake to the department, and department taught them sth to help them do the		

good work for the department		
When writing just fall asleep, don't want to write until deadline is coming		

Table 4

Simon

First round	Second round	Third round
When in Taiwan the environment around made you feel that English was very important for your work or your future in your life	Want to get high mark in assignment so read a lot, try to make the content clear and select the really needed sources	Do presentation several times and feel it is better to improve your English skills
English used to be good in junior high school, so try to study English again	Don't have exam so don't have to remember vocabulary exactly	
Want to improve score of IELTS		
Download paragraph from internet and read it over time could help to improve listening and speaking		

Table 5

Shirley

First round	Second round	Third round
Good writing can make teacher understand you, in some sense writing is more important than speaking		
When in Thailand in cram school lack of motivation to write well		
Environment is important to English learning, environment gives you a push because if you can't speak or write well you can't survive		

Table 6

Alice

First round	Second round	Third round
In senior high school, didn't like the content of the class so score in English was not as good as before	Just write on the paper notebook diary in Japanese try to write English on computer,	
With the right textbook, then like to open the textbook, like textbook with colourful and pretty pictures: like to open the book, working on some pages, think it is ground elements		
In intensive English school at first didn't like to talk, and not confident in English, but after that feel that like English very much	Listen to radio when feel lonely	
In pre-sessional try to speak English to Japanese people, when Master course starts, start speaking Japanese among Japanese people. It is natural because you are Japanese so you speak Japanese to them	When in England didn't want to learn vocabulary by heart in the real English environment, want to practise more spoken English,	

Table 7

Institute of Education

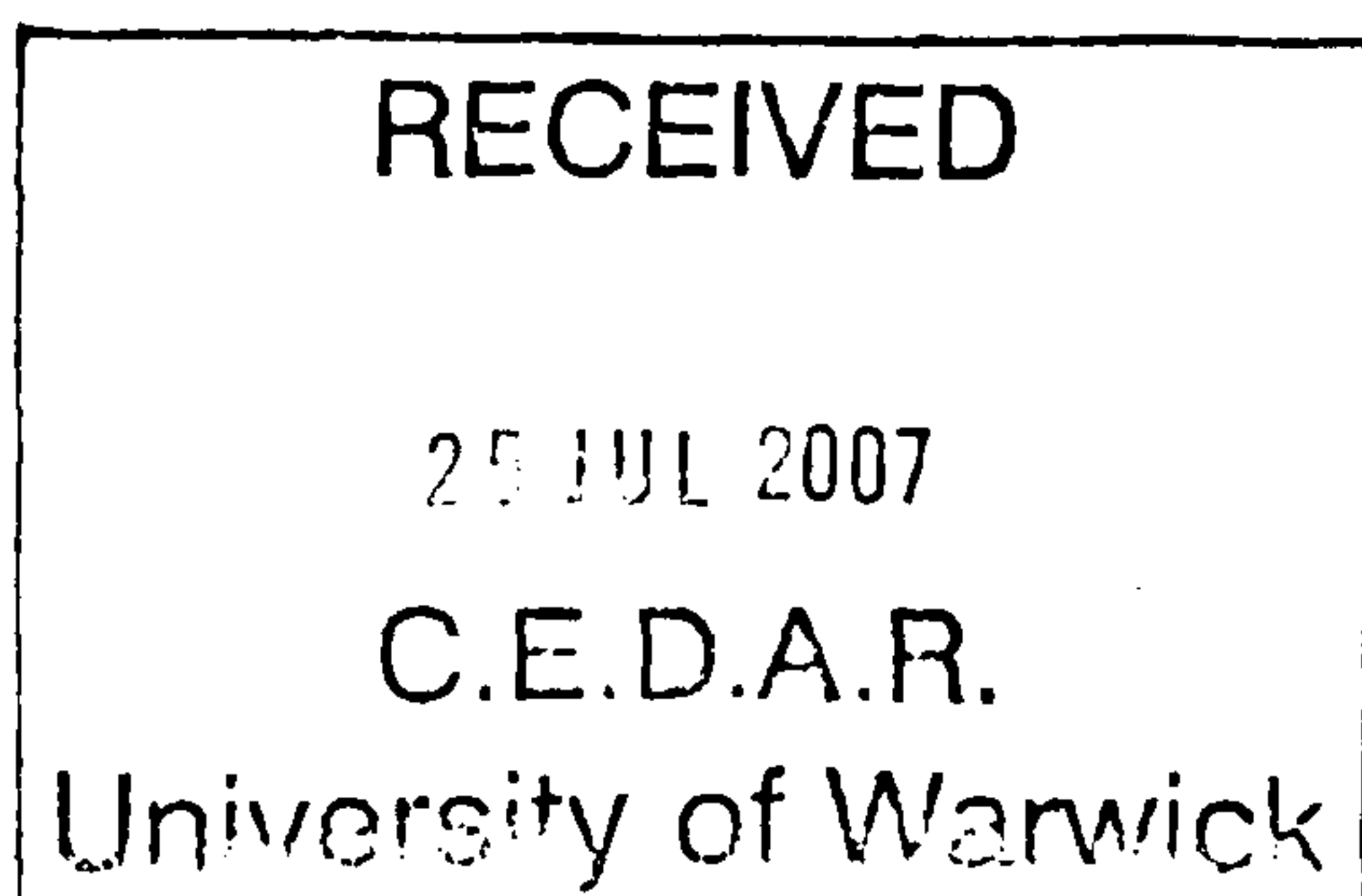
Research student and Masters by Research: Ethical Approval

All research undertaken by research student students and students undertaking a Masters degree by research must be approved not only for their technical, academic and professional appropriateness, but also to ensure they comply with ethical practice. The following process is intended to be speedy, but appropriate for these projects.

For *EdD* students, separate forms are required for each specialist study (8000 words) and the thesis

Process

1. The *student* specifies the ethical issues arising from the project and how these will be addressed. This is submitted on the Ethical Approval form with the proposal for the project.
2. The *supervisor* reviews the Ethical Approval form and recommends approval. If the supervisor is not satisfied, this shall be explored with the student and a revised proposal submitted which the supervisor is prepared to sign off as satisfactory.
3. The Ethical Approval form should be sent to the *Research Office*.
4. All Ethical Approval forms are considered by the Chair of the Ethics Subcommittee of Research Committee or a nominated colleague and returned to the supervisor via the Research Office; where a copy will be kept.
5. A report is made annually to the Research Committee.
6. A brief note of guidance for completing the form is appended.



Research degrees: Application for Ethical Approval

Name of student Wenli Wu

MA By research

EdD

PhD ✓

Project title Challenges of university academic adjustment: A case study of East Asian international postgraduate students at University of Warwick
Supervisor Michael Hammond
 Ann Barnes

Please ensure you have read the Guidance for the Ethical Conduct of Research available in the handbook.

Participants

Please specify all participants in the research including ages of children and young people where appropriate. Also specify if any participants are vulnerable e.g. as a result of learning disability.

East Asian students who attended pre-sessional course year 2024 summer, and continued to do a taught Master course at University of Warwick. Fourty of them. Aged 22-36.

Respect for participants' rights and dignity

How will the fundamental rights and dignity of participants be respected, e.g. confidentiality, respect of cultural and religious values?

All the participants took part in this project voluntarily. Before that I have explained to them what my research was about, what sort of questions I would ask, and how much time they would spend with me. All the data would be kept confidentially. I was aware of Privacy and Confidentiality their religious belief.

How will confidentiality be assured? Please address all aspects of research including protection of data records, thesis, reports/papers that might arise from the study.

I used ~~a~~ ^{anonymous} names for all my participant. All the data are kept at a safe place. I did not disclose any of our interview conversation to the third party.

Consent - will prior informed consent be obtained?

- from participants?

Yes

NO

 from others?

Yes

NO

- explain how this will be obtained. If prior informed consent is not to be obtained, give reason:

- will participants be explicitly informed of the student's status? Yes.

Competence

How will you ensure that all methods used are undertaken with the necessary competence?

I took foundational and advanced research methodology course which run by department. Before I did my interview and survey. I did pilot study with ~~other~~ 15 international students who were from different background. Before every ~~interview~~ survey. I did pilot ~~with~~ with other students who are from Asia but at different stage of study.

i) Well-being

How will participants' safety and well-being be safeguarded?

I made appointment with my participants before every interview. They chose their preferred interview time, place. I confirmed with them one day before the actual interview time. The interview were took place at students' hall, my office or students' sitting room ~~where~~ where safety and well-being can be guaranteed.

ii) Addressing dilemmas

Even well planned research can produce ethical dilemmas. How will you address any ethical dilemmas that may arise in your research?

2 students quit my study at the last stage of my research. I wrote email to them. and talked with their friends. I did not trace more when I found that they have emotional ~~prob~~ distress. I found out that they had personal problems. rather than angry with me on my study.

iii) Misuse of research

How will you ensure that the research and the evidence resulting from it are not misused?

I asked my colleagues and supervisor to check for me:

Integrity

How will you ensure that your research and its reporting are honest, fair and respectful to others? I sent my interview transcripts to my participants and asked them to check for me. ~~But~~ I will send my participants a copy of my research after I finished my first draft.

Have you and your supervisor discussed and agreed the basis for determining authorship of published work other than your thesis?

~~Not yet~~ ~~Yes~~ informally

Other issues?

Please specify other issues not discussed above, if any, and how you will address them.

None.

Signed Wenli Wu

Research student Wenli Wu

Date 24/07/07

Supervisor

Michael

Date

Please submit to the Research Office (Louisa Hopkins, room WE132)

Action taken

- ☒ Approved
- ☐ Approved with modification or conditions – see below
- ☐ Action deferred. Please supply additional information or clarification – see below

Name

Croft Lindsay

Date

9/8/07

Signature



Stamped

Notes of Action

The means of ensuring consent is not explicit but as the study has been undertaken this needs to be considered for future work

Appendix 6

Sample of questionnaire survey

Questionnaire

Dear student

I am carrying out research into overseas students' attitudes and experiences of using ICT at Warwick in developing English language skills. I hope this study will help provide better support for students in the future. Please could you help me carry out this study by ticking the option which best matches your situation? The results are confidential which means your name and information would not be shown in any public place without your permission. Please contact me if you would like to know more about my study.

Thank you very much in anticipation of your help!!

Wendy(Wenli) Wu

Email: wenli.wu@warwick.ac.uk

Mobile:07763212990

1. Have you had any assignment or test in term one or two? Please circle

a. yes

b. no

2. If you had any assignment or test in term one, were you satisfied with the result?

Please circle

a. satisfied b. not very satisfied c. satisfied in some ways, but not satisfied in other ways d. not satisfied

Please explain your answer:

3. Do you feel writing an assignment in English/doing an exam in English is

Please circle

a. very easy b. easy c. difficult d. very difficult

Please explain your answer:

.

4. In your opinion, would you get higher grade on your assignment/exam if you have better writing skills in English? Please circle

a. yes

b. no

Please explain your answer:

5. Besides your subject study, have you spent any time to improve your written English in term one?

a. yes (please go to 5a)

b. no (please go to 5b)

5a. If yes, what you have done; could you explain:

or

5b. If no, could you explain why

6. Now you are in the middle of your one year course, **at this stage**:

6a. Are you satisfied with your improvement in **speaking** English since you came to the UK? Please circle, and comment if you wish

a. satisfied b. not very satisfied c. satisfied in some ways, but not satisfied in other ways d. not satisfied

6b. Are you satisfied with your improvement in **writing** English since you came to the UK? Please circle, and comment if you wish

a. satisfied b. not very satisfied c. satisfied in some ways, but not satisfied in other ways d. not satisfied

6c. Are you satisfied with your improvement in **listening to** English since you came to the UK? Please circle, and comment if you wish

a. satisfied b. not very satisfied c. satisfied in some ways, but not satisfied in other ways d. not satisfied

6d. Are you satisfied with your improvement in **reading** English since you came to the UK? Please circle, and comment if you wish

a. satisfied b. not very satisfied c. satisfied in some ways, but not satisfied in other ways d. not satisfied

7. Are you confident with your English grammar, and writing structure, when you are writing assignments? Please circle, and comment if you wish

a. very confident b. reasonably confident c. not very confident d. not at all confident

8. What problems do you have when you are writing your assignments in English?

(tick all that apply)

- a. lack of vocabulary
- b. unsure of what is expected
- c. lack of practice
- d. lack of feedback, so the speed of progress is very slow
- e. have no interest in it
- f. lack of cooperation with tutor
- g. lack of cooperation with peers
- f.. others (please specify) _____

9. To improve your writing in English, what helps you? (tick all that apply)

- a. peer support
- b. feedback from tutors
- c. tutor support
- d. specific English support class
- e. models of writing
- f. self-study materials
- g. computer-based support
- h. others (please specify) _____.

10. I will achieve more in my academic life if I am confident in using ICT (choose the option which applies most to you)

- a. agree strongly b. agree c. disagree d. disagree strongly

11. I feel more confident in _____ among all the English skills at this stage.(please circle the one that applies)

- a. listening b. speaking c. reading d. writing

12. From last October until now, (please circle)

12 a. I have watched original English language movies

- a. true of me b. not true of me

12 b. I have read English language novels

a. true of me

b. not true of me

12 c. I have read English language newspapers

a. true of me

b. not true of me

13. Are the following sentences true or false? Please circle

a. I think the In-Sessional English course was helpful for me. T/F

b. I think the new Learning Grid in University is helpful for me. T/F

c. I think access to a web blog is helpful. T/F

d. I think attending seminars, presentations, tutorials, and group discussions are helpful.

T/F

e. I think writing assignments, and getting feedback from supervisors is helpful.

T/F

14. Please complete the sentence:

I think the university could provide _____
to improve my English.

Please add any further comments you may have about getting settled at Warwick and anything you would like to add about language skills and about ICT.

Many thanks for completing the questionnaire.

Appendix 7

Summary of challenges mentioned by participants

Challenges	Emily	Janet	James	Max	Paul	Simon	Alice	Shirley
Listening to lectures			√	√	√	√		√
Writing assignments in English	√	√	√			√	√	√
Doing examinations in English		√			√			
Taking part in group discussions	√		√					
Understanding specific English vocabulary which related to their subject	√			√		√		√
Following other people's spoken English	√	√	√	√		√	√	√
Speaking English appropriately for the context	√	√	√				√	√
Communicating with people who were from different culture background	√	√	√		√		√	√
Food related problems				√	√			
Having problems in accommodation		√	√		√			
Having depressing feelings			√				√	√
Doing paid part time jobs				√				
Making international friends	√		√		√	√	√	√

Table 24: Summary of challenges mentioned by participants in the first term

Challenges	Emily	Janet	James	Max	Paul	Simon	Alice	Shirley
Doing group work and group discussion	√		√					
Writing English assignments and taking English examinations	√	√		√	√		√	
Attending intensive lectures			√					
Resitting examinations or rewriting assignments		√		√			√	√

Table 25: Summary of challenges mentioned by participants in the second term

Challenges	Emily	Janet	Jame s	Max	Paul	Simon	Alic e	Shirley
Arranging time in a more manageable way							√	√
Having pressure to arrange for the future			√	√			√	
Missing home						√		

Table 26: Summary of challenges mentioned by participants in the third term